

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2007

As Passed House:
February 13, 2022

Title: An act relating to establishing a nurse educator loan repayment program under the Washington health corps.

Brief Description: Establishing a nurse educator loan repayment program under the Washington health corps.

Sponsors: Representatives Slatter, Cody, Bergquist, Goodman, Leavitt, Peterson, Ramel, Ryu, Santos, Senn, Tharinger, Chopp, Macri, Bateman, Ormsby, Riccelli, Lekanoff and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 1/24/22, 1/27/22 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/22, 97-1.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Nurse Educator Loan Repayment Program under the umbrella of the Washington Health Corps.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Chambers, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Hansen, Paul, Pollet and Sells.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Kraft.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Sutherland.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

Washington Health Corps.

The Washington Health Corps was established in 2019 to encourage health care professionals to work in shortage areas by providing loan repayment. The Washington Health Corps is an umbrella program under which two loan repayment programs were placed: the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Conditional Scholarship Program and the Behavioral Health Loan Repayment program. The programs provide licensed professionals with repayment on all or a portion of participants' outstanding student loans in exchange for service at an eligible site. Eligible sites are health care facilities that provide comprehensive outpatient, ambulatory, and primary health care services.

Both programs are administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), in collaboration with the Department of Health, under the same structure and application process. Both programs provide a maximum loan repayment award of \$75,000 for a minimum three-year service obligation of full-time employment. A participant is required to work at least a 24-hour work week and is allowed 40 days per year in leave. If the participant works less than a full-time work schedule, the employment is the prorated equivalent for up to five years. The programs differ in who is eligible and what the eligible shortage areas are.

If a participant defaults on the terms of their service obligation, a penalty is assessed. The penalty for both programs is an amount equal to the unsatisfied portion of the service obligation or the total amount paid on the participant's behalf, whichever is less, plus interest, in addition to costs associated with collection of the debt.

Nurse Educators.

A nurse educator is a registered nurse who holds an advanced degree and serves as a faculty member in a nursing school or teaching hospital. Nurse educators are responsible for developing, implementing, evaluating, updating, and teaching nursing education curriculum. An advanced degree includes, but is not limited to, a Master of Nursing, Doctor of Nursing Practice, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing.

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission.

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (Commission) is a 15 member, governor appointed board responsible for the regulation of advanced registered nurse practitioners, licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, and certified nursing technicians. The Commission establishes, monitors, and enforces licensing, standards of practice, continuing competency mechanisms, and discipline.

Summary of Bill:

The Nurse Educator Loan Repayment Program (NELR Program) is established under the umbrella of the Washington Health Corps. Nurse educators who teach for an approved nursing program are eligible for the program. "Nurse educator" is defined as an individual with an advanced nursing degree beyond a bachelor's degree that teaches nursing curriculum and is a faculty member for an approved nursing program. "Approved nursing program" is defined to mean a nursing educational program that leads to a degree or licensure in nursing that is approved by the Commission and is located at an institution of higher education that is authorized to participate in state financial aid programs. The WSAC, in consultation with the Department of Health, must determine selection criteria for nurse educators and for approved nursing programs.

The NELR Program is administered by the WSAC using the same administrative structure and includes the same responsibilities as the other Washington Health Corps programs, such as establishing annual award amounts, establishing the required service obligation, and collecting payments from participants who fail to complete their service obligation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are 6,000 fewer nurses in the state than what is needed. Over the last 10 years, the state has been trying to address the nurse shortage, which the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and laid bare. The colleges that teach nursing cannot enroll additional students to help fulfill the shortage because there are not enough nurse educators to teach them. The state has learned that more nurse educators are needed to teach students, more simulation testing is needed, and there needs to be more ways to structure clinical training. Half of the nursing degrees conferred are from nonprofit higher education institutions who contribute vitally to preparing nursing students. The state should take a holistic approach and leverage all parts of the higher education system.

In 2017 the Washington Center for Nursing found that 70 percent of nursing schools reported programs with faculty vacancies. Every week the colleges are losing faculty and it has become harder to fill faculty positions during the pandemic. Clinical practice is more lucrative than teaching. Many nurse educators also work part-time in order to support their families. Nurse educators must have an advanced degree, and graduate education is expensive. Student loans can equal more than \$100,000, so loan repayment would encourage more nurses to go into education.

There should be an amendment to include school nurses in the loan repayment program and

designate public schools as critically important sites. Nurses get excited about working with students until they realize the drastic pay difference, which makes it a difficult decision to be a school nurse. Since there are shortages, staff who are not qualified to work with children are standing in as nurses.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There is troubling research that suggests that one in five health care professionals decided to leave their practice due to the pandemic. The Washington Health Corps programs have been a tremendous success. One program is flexible across different types of professions, and the other is dedicated to behavioral health professions. There were 300 applications and only 192 applicants were funded. The Health Professional Loan Repayment Program dollars should not be competing with nurse educators. An amendment to create a separate account would be appreciated.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Vandana Slatter, prime sponsor; Christina Nyirati, Heritage University Department of Nursing; Samantha Fogg, Seattle Council Parent Teacher Student Association; HuiLing Yang, Seattle Public Schools; Gloria Brigham, Washington State Nurses Association; Melanie Jorgenson; and Shea Hamilton, Independent Colleges of Washington.

(Other) Kate White Tudor, Washington Association for Community Health.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.