
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5335

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senate Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Slatter, Harris, Bateman, Chapman, Hasegawa, Holy, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Salomon, Trudeau, and Valdez)

READ FIRST TIME 02/05/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the rural nursing education
2 program; adding new sections to chapter 43.70 RCW; creating a new
3 section; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that sustainable
6 change is needed for rural health care nursing education. Nursing is
7 the largest health care profession in the United States, yet rural
8 hospitals, affiliated clinics, and underserved rural communities are
9 experiencing a shortage of skilled registered nurses, including nurse
10 practitioners who begin their careers as registered nurses, making it
11 even more difficult to meet the health care needs of rural and
12 underserved populations.

13 The legislature finds the major barriers that rural nursing
14 students face are lack of access to affordable child care, lack of
15 transportation and safe and extended commute times, and lack of
16 access to internet services and computers. The added burden of the
17 COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent reports of staff burnout, nurses
18 leaving the profession, and higher salaries in urban areas has made
19 it difficult for rural health care facilities, such as the state's
20 critical access hospitals, to compete with larger hospital systems in
21 attracting and retaining a qualified workforce. Nurses living and

1 working in rural communities are in short supply and high demand.
2 Rural hospitals rely heavily on a substitute workforce such as
3 traveling nurses, which is costly, unsustainable, and has significant
4 recruitment and retention challenges.

5 The legislature recognizes the rural nursing education program, a
6 statewide program created in 2023 by a collaboration of health care
7 stakeholders, addresses the concerns of the rural nursing workforce.
8 The program fosters community-based collaborations between academic
9 institutions, students, and rural community health care partners and
10 has developed a remote grow-your-own nursing education plan that
11 educates prelicensure students as registered nurses who want to
12 learn, live, and work in their rural communities as registered
13 nurses. The program plans to initially offer associate degree
14 prelicensure education with the addition of future programs when
15 resources are available. The legislature intends to codify the
16 program as the rural nursing education program to create a future
17 where underserved rural communities are fully staffed with qualified
18 nurses and thrive with robust health care services staffed by local
19 talent.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
21 throughout sections 3 and 4 of this act unless the context clearly
22 requires otherwise.

23 (1) "Institution of higher education" has the same meaning as in
24 RCW 28B.10.016.

25 (2) "Nurse" or "nursing" has the same meaning as in RCW
26 18.79.020.

27 (3) "Participant" means a student at a participating institution
28 of higher education who is admitted into the program.

29 (4) "Participating hospital" means a rural hospital licensed
30 under chapter 70.41 RCW that is participating in the rural nursing
31 education program.

32 (5) "Program" means the rural nursing education program
33 established under section 3 of this act.

34 (6) "Rural" means a geographic area that has a shortage of
35 nursing health services, as determined by the department.

36 (7) "Rural nursing education" means education and training
37 programs with access to distance nursing education and training
38 opportunities designed to prepare students for initial licensure as

1 registered nurses, provided or developed in collaboration with an
2 institution of higher education and rural community partners.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The rural nursing education program is
4 established within the department to provide distance nursing
5 education, sustain lasting change in rural health care nursing
6 education, and improve quality nursing care for underserved rural
7 populations across the state.

8 (1) In administering the program, the department shall:

9 (a) Develop participant selection criteria, including the
10 requirement that an eligible participant:

11 (i) Is eligible to enroll in a nursing education or training
12 program; and

13 (ii) Has declared an intention to serve in a rural area upon
14 completion of the participant's nursing education or training
15 program;

16 (b) Develop a program application in collaboration with rural
17 health care community partners, rural hospitals, and participating
18 institutions of higher education;

19 (c) Collaborate with rural health care community partners,
20 including academic partners, local workforce development councils,
21 the Washington state board of nursing, the Washington state hospital
22 association, and exclusive bargaining representatives of nursing
23 professions in the development of a remote rural nursing education
24 program to connect participants, institutions of higher education,
25 and community partners. The program must address barriers and provide
26 support services to assist participants in learning, living, and
27 working within their rural communities;

28 (d) Collaborate with rural health care community partners,
29 including critical access hospitals and other rural hospitals, rural
30 health clinics, federally qualified health centers, long-term care
31 facilities, community and behavioral health sites, and tribal health
32 systems to identify, evaluate, and address rural nursing shortages;
33 and

34 (e) Collaborate with participating institutions of higher
35 education and rural health care partners to design innovative and
36 uniquely tailored models of rural nursing education, such as
37 dedicated education units and innovative maternal health and
38 pediatric clinical experiences, including the use of remote
39 simulation and learning.

1 (2) Participating rural hospitals and health care facilities
2 shall:

3 (a) Establish and update methods to identify and recruit active
4 employees who meet or are likely to meet participant selection
5 criteria and conduct communications and outreach to these potential
6 participants; and

7 (b) Encourage potential participants to contact the program and a
8 participating institution of higher education for application
9 information.

10 (3) Participating institutions of higher education shall:

11 (a) Establish and update methods to communicate with community
12 partners to identify and recruit students who meet or are likely to
13 meet participant selection criteria and conduct communications and
14 outreach to these potential participants;

15 (b) Establish a program cohort within the institution's nursing
16 program for participants; and

17 (c) Implement innovative and uniquely tailored models of rural
18 nursing education and clinical experiences for participants as
19 established in subsection (1)(e) of this section.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) By November 1, 2026, the department
21 shall submit a preliminary report to the appropriate committees of
22 the legislature, in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, on the
23 demographics and number of participants, preceptors, and clinical
24 faculty training participants of the program established in section 3
25 of this act.

26 (2) Beginning November 1, 2028, and every two years thereafter,
27 the department shall report to the appropriate committees of the
28 legislature, in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, the outcomes of the
29 program established in section 3 of this act. The report must
30 include:

31 (a) The number and demographics of participants;

32 (b) The number of participants who have completed the program;

33 (c) The number of participants who have completed the program and
34 are employed as registered nurses in rural communities;

35 (d) The number of preceptors and clinical faculty training
36 participants; and

37 (e) Program outcomes, including clinical sites and experiences,
38 satisfaction surveys, and evaluation measures.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** Sections 2 through 4 of this act are each
2 added to chapter 43.70 RCW.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** This act is necessary for the immediate
4 preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of
5 the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes
6 effect July 1, 2025.

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