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**SENATE BILL 5335**

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**State of Washington**

**69th Legislature**

**2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Slatter, Harris, Bateman, Chapman, Hasegawa, Holy, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Salomon, Trudeau, and Valdez

Read first time 01/17/25. Referred to Committee on Health & Long-Term Care.

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

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.

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