

Senate Bill 895

More Pathways to Nursing

Senator Richard D. Roth (D-Riverside)

SUMMARY

SB 895 would authorize the Office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to select up to 15 community college districts with an existing nationally accreditedⁱ Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree.

This pilot program will enable California to utilize the existing ADN program infrastructure at community colleges to supplement the work of existing public and private BSN programs to produce BSN degreed nurses who are qualified to become supervisors and managers in healthcare facilities, and who are qualified to become Master's or Doctorate degreed nurse practitioners in independent practice settings, and as members of nursing school faculty.

As part of the pilot program established by this bill, the Office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges is required to give priority to community college districts located in underserved nursing areas, and to develop a process to assist community college district nursing programs without national accreditation to attain national accreditation for purposes of qualifying for this pilot program. Additionally, the bill authorizes the Chancellor's office to provisionally select schools that are candidates for accreditation to participate in the pilot program.

BACKGROUND

For decades, California has suffered from a shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs). This challenge has been exacerbated in recent years by the global pandemic and is expected to worsen due to an increase in RN retirements. While this is a national problem, it is particularly acute in California, where there are 995 RNs per 100,000 people, ranking 40th out of 50 States. Some nursing advocates have

argued that California's ratio should be closer to the 25th percentile (1,030 RN's per 100,000) or even the national average (1,179 RN's per 100,000).ⁱⁱ

One contributing factor to this crisis is that California's nursing school capacity has not been able to keep up with demand. In 2018, more than 85% of hospitals in California reported that the demand for RNs was greater than the available supply – a situation that has not improved.ⁱⁱⁱ During the 2021-22 school year, 64,299 students filed qualified applications for admission to California's nursing programs (public and private); of those, only 16,612 students were accepted and 47,687 students were rejected, for a 75% rejection rate.^{iv} So, tens of thousands of future nurses were turned away from the profession due to capacity issues.

Another factor that contributes to the nursing shortage is the change in the nursing credential required by the State's healthcare employers. For over 40 years, the community college Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) has been the basic credential for entry into employment as an RN at a healthcare facility; and, the California State University and University of California nursing programs (along with the State's private nursing programs) have historically awarded the Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree to those who elect to pursue a four-year degree. In 2021-22, community college ADN graduates represented over 40% of all students completing a pre-licensure nursing program in California. However, an increasing number of healthcare facilities are now preferring, if not requiring, new hires to have a BSN degree as described below.

PROBLEM

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) issued its Future of Nursing report which contained a set of recommendations, including the recommendation that the proportion of RNs with a BSN degree in health care facilities increase to 80% by 2020.^v Although that goal was not met by 2020, in recent years, there has been an

increased push by credentialing organizations to meet that 80% goal.

In 2023, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing surveyed 810 nursing schools in the United States and found that 25% of hospitals and other healthcare facilities are now *requiring* new hires to have a BSN, with 69.8% of healthcare employers expressing a strong *preference* for BSN graduates.^{vi} In California, a 2021 Health Impact report found that 18% of California hospitals surveyed stated that a BSN was *required* for employment – twice the percentage noted in 2017 – and 54.3% reported a *preference* for hiring BSN’s. And, 31.5% of the new ADN RN’s surveyed stated that the lack of a BSN degree was given as the reason for their failure to be hired.^{vii} The demand for production of BSN credentialed RN’s continues to increase without a corresponding increase in the capacity to train them at our public nursing schools.

SOLUTION

In a community college ADN program, ADN students complete all of the clinical nursing courses required for licensure as an RN in California; and, after passing the National Nursing Licensure Examination (NCLEX), they secure a California RN license. From a curriculum standpoint, the nursing clinical component of the BSN program is the same as the clinical program applicable to ADN programs; and, the NCLEX and RN licensure requirements are the same. The difference between the two programs consists of approximately 30 units which includes liberal arts/management coursework and one community health course required for the award of the BSN degree. Critically, since these BSN students will already be licensed RNs, no supervised clinical placement slots are utilized in this pilot BSN degree program.

The way to bridge the BSN gap in this State is to take advantage of existing ADN programs to begin to close the supply-demand gap. SB 895 does this in an incremental way by creating a pilot program and authorizing the Chancellor of the Community Colleges to select up to 15 community college districts with an existing nationally accredited ADN program (or a program in “candidate” status) to offer a BSN degree. The bill limits the size of the pilot

program to 25% of each ADN program’s class, or 35 students, whichever is greater. This pilot program will supplement (not supplant) the production of BSN degreed nurses from the State’s public or private four-year nursing programs and will be cost neutral. Unless extended, this pilot program will sunset on January 1, 2034.

SPONSORS

- United Nurses Associations of California (UNAC)
- Community College League of California
- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
- California Hospital Association
- Student Senate for California Community Colleges
- Los Angeles Community College District
- Cerritos Community College District
- El Camino Community College District

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ⁱ ‘National Accreditation’ refers to accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)
ⁱⁱ Spetz J., Chu L., Blash L., Forecasts of the Registered Nurse Workforce in California, Phillip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, Aug 2022
ⁱⁱⁱ Spetz J., Regional Forecasts of the Registered Nurse Workforce in California, Dec 2018.
^{iv} Spetz J., Chu L., Blash L., California Board of Registered Nursing 2021-2022 Annual School Report, Aug 2023
^v The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, National Academy of Medicine (2011)
^{vi} American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Research Brief, Employment of New Nurse Graduates and Employee Preferences for Baccalaureate Prepared Nurses, Oct 2023.
^{vii} Chan G., Orłowski C., Burns E., Health Impact, California Newly Licensed RN Employment Survey Research Report, September 2021.