



**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**JOSH STEIN**  
**GOVERNOR**

December 9, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

I respectfully urge you to reconsider the U.S. Department of Education's recent proposed limits on federal student loan assistance for many professional and graduate-level health care degree programs. Our shared home state is already challenged to address a significant nursing shortage, and these limits particularly threaten our bipartisan progress by constraining avenues for career advancement and undermining the critical pipeline of advanced degree-holding nursing professionals we need to train our nursing workforce. We need the federal government's support to continue making nursing-related fields accessible and competitive career pathways for North Carolinians.

Nurses are among the most trusted professionals in our communities, delivering skilled, lifesaving care in hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and homes. Their education is rigorous and clearly professional in nature, requiring extensive clinical training and instruction. We should be reducing barriers to advancement in this profession, not making it harder for these professionals to pursue the nursing credentials that prepare them to care for patients. Already, of the nearly 40 percent of nurses in North Carolina who plan to leave the profession within five years, one-fifth [cite](#) a lack of opportunity for promotion or advancement. The proposed limits to federal loan assistance for educational progression in the nursing field would only compound such a sentiment in this critical segment of our health care workforce.

Furthermore, the proposed limits would be particularly harmful to North Carolina, which suffers from a greater nursing shortage relative to the already outsized demand for nurses felt nationally. One 2025 [report](#) found an approximately 13 percent vacancy rate of registered nurses in our state and a 15

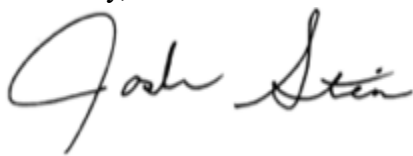
percent vacancy rate in our rural counties, compared to an average of 10 percent nationally. Our state vacancy rate stands at approximately one-third for licensed practical nurses. Another [report](#) rated North Carolina's shortage of nursing related professionals the eighth worst in the United States, and by 2033, our state will [require](#) an estimated 17,500 additional nursing professionals to meet the demands of our rapidly growing population.

Despite the magnitude of this challenge, our state has made bipartisan progress to address this issue. In 2023, our General Assembly appropriated \$55 million for our state's community college system to address shortages in fields like nursing. These investments helped fund 108 programs across all 58 of our state's community colleges, including 32 associate degree in nursing (ADN) and practical nursing (PN) programs. Last year, the UNC System invested \$29 million in expanding nursing programs at 12 public universities and Area Health Education Centers. Recognizing that our state still has more work to do on this issue, my proposed budget directs \$10 million to North Carolina's Independent Colleges and Universities and \$1 million to our Area Health Education Centers to expand our workforce in nursing and other high-demand health care fields.

However, the limits proposed by the Department of Education would severely impede our efforts to expand nursing education at precisely the moment North Carolina needs to grow our health care workforce pipeline. North Carolina has an 11 percent vacancy [rate](#) of full-time nursing faculty positions that require graduate-level education. With fewer nurses able to access graduate-level education, we risk having fewer qualified educators to teach the next generation of nurses resulting in fewer seats in nursing programs precisely when we need more. Our state has seen a 15 percent [increase](#) in the number of newly licensed nurses entering the workforce in the past three years. Yet, these proposed limits threaten that progress by shrinking the number of educational opportunities available to students in nursing-related fields and slowing the pace at which we can enroll, graduate, and license new nurses.

For these reasons, I reiterate my call for the U.S. Department of Education to reconsider and revise this proposal so that it does not restrict the career and educational opportunities needed to build the health care workforce our state and our nation need. These professionals have earned our respect through their skill, resilience, and commitment to their patients and communities. My administration stands ready to work with your Department to ensure federal policy supports rather than constrains the health care workforce pipeline our state needs to keep North Carolinians safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Stein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Josh" and last name "Stein" clearly distinguishable.

Josh Stein  
Governor