

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2023

Joe Baker
Executive Director
Board of Nursing
Florida Department of Health
4052 Bald Cypress Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Rayna Letourneau, PhD, RN
Executive Director
Florida Center for Nursing
University of South Florida College of Nursing
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC 22
Tampa, FL 33612

Re: Inquiring into the qualification, readiness, and challenges of Florida's future nursing workforce

Dear Mr. Baker and Dr. Letourneau:

As you know, there is currently a nursing shortage in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there will be over 200,000 unfilled openings for registered nurses every year over the next decade.¹ The nursing profession continues to face shortages due to a myriad of hurdles including a lack of qualified educators, high turnover, an aging population and workforce, burnout, and increased violence in the healthcare setting.² Nationally, data show that 100,000 nurses left the workforce during the pandemic.³ By 2027, almost 900,000 (nearly one-fifth of all registered nurses) intend to leave the workforce, threatening the national health care system at large.⁴ A 2021 report projected that the state of Florida alone will face a shortfall of nearly 60,000 nurses by 2035.⁵ The current and worsening shortage of registered nurses nationally and in the state of Florida demand that Congress and the state of Florida ensure that those willing and able to become nurses are qualified to enter the profession.

In the United States, several steps must be taken before a nurse can earn a license to practice, including passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) to qualify as a registered nurse. The NCLEX first-time passage rate is generally used as an indicator of nursing program effectiveness.⁶ In 2022, the national NCLEX passage rate was 79.9 percent, whereas, in

¹ Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, *Occupational Outlook Handbook: Registered Nurses*, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS (Sept. 8, 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm#tab-6>.

² See generally, Lisa M. Haddad et al., *Nursing Shortage*, STATPEARLS (2023), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK493175/>.

³ NCSBN Research Projects Significant Nursing Workforce Shortages and Crisis, NCSBN (April 13, 2023), <https://www.ncsbn.org/news/ncsbn-research-projects-significant-nursing-workforce-shortages-and-crisis>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Florida Nurse Workforce Projections: 2019 to 2035, Prepared for the Florida Hospital Association and the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida*, IHS MARKIT (July 27, 2021), <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Aascds%3AUS%3Aac48ae7d-ff75-4a08-9a3d-cebbd0d08c27&viewer%21megaVerb=group-discover>.

⁶ *Nursing Education Report: January 2023*, FLORIDA CTR. FOR NURSING at 23 (Jan. 2023), <https://www.flcenterfornursing.org/Portals/0/2021-2022%20Education%20Report%201.30.2023.pdf?ver=ANkn5dadiig2HVEjpObCNQ%3d%3d>.

the state of Florida, the passage rate was 63.88 percent, the lowest in the country.⁷ In Florida, 2022 was the third consecutive year where NCLEX passage rates have fallen—the state has had the lowest national passage rate since 2017.⁸ Passage rates across the state vary by the type of school, the accreditation attained by the nursing school, and the region of attendance.

Public nursing schools in Florida had an NCLEX passage rate that mirrors the national average at over 79 percent, while private schools fall below the state average at 57.96 percent in 2022.⁹ Non-profit institutions in the state had a passage rate of 79.2 percent, while for-profit schools had a passage rate of 52.78 percent.¹⁰ Schools “accredited” by the Florida Board of Nursing had a 76.86 percent passage rate in 2022 while “approved” schools and “probationary” schools had passage rates of 66.11 percent and 54.53 percent, respectively.¹¹ As demonstrated in Table 1 below, nursing students in the north and central parts of Florida had higher NCLEX passage rates compared to those located in southern Florida.¹²

Table 1. 2022 Florida NCLEX Passage Rates by Region

Region	2022 Pass Rates
Northwest	75.72%
North Central	72.85%
Northeast	82.18%
East Central	76.40%
West Central	74.28%
Southeast	54.26%
Southwest	71.53%
South	55.98%

Source: *Florida Center for Nursing: Nursing Education Report January 2023*

The varying levels of NCLEX passage rates across the state delineated by region, type of school, and accreditation level greatly endanger patients and facilities in need of qualified nurses who are willing to enter the profession of nursing. Ensuring a qualified workforce of nurses in the state of Florida is a matter of public health and safety.

⁷ *Id.* at 24.

⁸ *Id.*, Mackenzie Bean, *Florida’s NCLEX pass rate falls to 64%, lowest in US*, BECKER HOSPITAL REVIEW (Feb. 6, 2023), <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/nursing/floridas-nclex-pass-rate-falls-to-64-lowest-in-us.html>.

⁹ *Supra* note 6, at 32.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 34.

¹¹ *Id.* at 35.

¹² *Id.* at 30.

In addition to the difficulties experienced by nursing students in Florida to become properly licensed, the state has also come under scrutiny by the Department of Justice as some Florida nursing schools fraudulently sold nursing degree diplomas and transcripts to desperate students wanting to qualify to sit for the NCLEX.¹³ The scheme uncovered earlier this year found that more than 7,600 fraudulent nursing diplomas were issued by three schools that have now been closed: Siena College in Broward County, Sacred Heart International Institute in Broward County, and the Palm Beach School of Nursing.¹⁴ The more than 7,600 fraudulent nurses from Florida jeopardize public safety, trust, and damage the reputation of nurses who have completed the requirements to be trusted healthcare professionals.

To better understand the challenges faced by the state and ways in which Congress can help, the undersigned request a response by August 18, 2023, to the following questions from the Florida Board of Nursing and the Florida Center for Nursing:

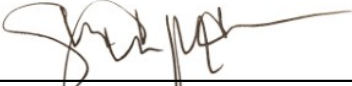
1. What oversight opportunities are currently being implemented to increase NCLEX passage rates across regions, types of schools, and accreditation levels?
2. What steps are being taken to provide increased scrutiny of potentially fraudulent nursing schools in Florida?
3. What is being done to encourage more students to enter the vocation of nursing in Florida?
4. Are there opportunities to increase nursing faculty to keep up with the demand for nursing programs?
5. What support is needed at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure an adequate nursing workforce in the state?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. For additional information, please contact the office of U.S. Representative Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick at (202) 225-1313 and confirm receipt of this letter by emailing Fabian Lucero in Representative Cherfilus-McCormick's office at Fabian.Lucero@mail.house.gov.


Sincerely,

¹³ *Fraudulent Nursing Diploma Scheme Leads to Federal Charges Against 25 Defendants*, U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA (Jan. 25, 2023), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/fraudulent-nursing-diploma-scheme-leads-federal-charges-against-25-defendants>.

¹⁴ *Id.*



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress