

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 9, 2022

The Honorable Shalanda Young  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20503

Director Young:

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the already overstretched nursing workforce is being forced to grapple with a host of new and intensifying challenges that now threaten the stability and quality of the health care system.<sup>1</sup> While the Biden Administration has worked tirelessly to support the nursing workforce, it is now abundantly clear that improved federal and state coordination is needed to monitor nursing shortages, coordinate strategies to alleviate the pressures on the nursing workforce, and advise policymakers, health care leaders, and educators. As you work to develop the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2024 (President's Budget), it is imperative that the President's Budget include a comprehensive proposal to centralize the study of the ongoing nursing workforce issues, such as through the establishment of a National Nursing Workforce Research program.

As the nation's largest healthcare profession, with nearly 4.2 million registered nurses (RNs) nationwide, and a disproportionate employer of women and racial minorities, a robust nursing workforce is critical for improving health, economic security, and equity in this country.<sup>2</sup> For many reasons, nurses are leaving the profession in record numbers, including distressing work environments, the significant burden placed on nurses by the pandemic, and educational bottlenecks.<sup>3,4</sup> Employment levels for registered nurses declined by three percent between 2020 and 2021, the largest decline in at least 20 years.<sup>1</sup> And fewer practicing nurses are resulting in delays in treatments or procedures as hospitals close departments, longer hospital stays, and increased incidents of adverse patient events.<sup>5</sup> The economic burden of the nursing shortage is

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<sup>1</sup> Bombardieri, M., Bradley C., Anona N., Justin S., & Marina Z. (2022, May 23). *How To Ease the Nursing Shortage in America*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/how-to-ease-the-nursing-shortage-in-america/>

<sup>2</sup> Smiley, R. A., Ruttinger, C., Oliveira, C. M., Hudson, L. R., Allgeyer, R., Reneau, K. A., Silvestre, J. H., & Alexander, M. (April 2021). The 2020 National Nursing Workforce Survey. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 12(1), Supplement (S1-S48). [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2155-8256\(21\)00027-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2155-8256(21)00027-2)

<sup>3</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022, January 1). *Data Spotlight: The Impact of Insufficient Clinical Sites on Baccalaureate Program Admissions*. <https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/News/View/ArticleId/25127/January-2022-Data-Spotlight-Impact-of-Insufficient-Clinical-Sites-on-Baccalaureate-Program-Admissions>

<sup>4</sup> Incredible Health. (2022). *STUDY: 34% of Nurses Plan to Leave their Current Role by the End of 2022*. <https://www.incrediblehealth.com/blog/nursing-report-covid-19-2022/>

<sup>5</sup> Dall, T., Chen, Y., Seifert, R., Maddox, P., Hogan, P. (2009). The economic value of professional nursing. *Med Care*, 47(1):97-104. doi: 10.1097/MLR.0b013e3181844da8. PMID: 19106737.

substantial as experts estimate that annual burnout-related turnover alone costs hospitals \$9 billion for nurses.<sup>6</sup>

As the nursing landscape rapidly evolves, stakeholders need up-to-date, actionable information on emerging nursing trends to develop sound interventions and effectively target resources. HRSA’s own 2021 Health Workforce Strategic Plan acknowledges that “workforce supply and demand data are not static” and that “for data that do exist, data analysis is difficult, as the quality and granularity vary widely, and data sources, formats, and occupational definitions are inconsistent.”<sup>7</sup> Considering these findings and the acute concerns of the nursing shortage, the Center for American Progress recommended the establishment or designation of federal and state-level entities to monitor nursing shortages. Noting specifically:

*A permanent body must be authorized to document the state of the nursing workforce and advise on policy solutions to address challenges..... Congress should fund and deputize state-level nursing workforce organizations to address state-specific nursing shortages. Many states have nursing workforce centers, organizations that typically work to develop and share best practices in nursing workforce practice and policy, but they do not always have a direct mandate to inform state government decisions on educational pipelines or workplace conditions. A set of state-level organizations with a consistent mandate, and a reporting structure to a national commission.... would be able to advise on state-level nursing shortages.<sup>1</sup>*

Senator Merkley and I introduced the bipartisan National Nursing Workforce Center Act of 2022 (H.R.8817/S.4844) to address the findings of both the Health Workforce Strategic Plan and leading public policy advocates. This bill would also make a small technical correction to enable HRSA to establish a federal nursing-focused Health Workforce Research Center and provide funding to support state-based nursing workforce centers. While HRSA currently has the capacity to analyze workforce data from other professions through the nine existing Health Workforce Research Centers, its ability to coordinate and conduct research on nursing workforce issues is severely constrained because HRSA is statutorily prohibited from adding a nursing-focused Health Workforce Research Center.

I believe enabling HRSA to create a nursing-focused Health Workforce Research Center and enhanced federal support and coordination of state-based nursing workforce centers will help put the profession of nursing back on stable footing. I therefore request that you consider including the following language in the President’s Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2024:

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2022). Addressing Health Worker Burnout: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on Building a Thriving Health Workforce. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/health-worker-wellbeing-advisory.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2021). *Health Workforce Strategic Plan 2021*. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/about-us/hhs-health-workforce-strategic-plan-2021.pdf>

***Nursing Workforce Centers***

*The U.S. has experienced cyclical nursing workforce challenges for decades, but none as pronounced as today's challenges. The HRSA Health Workforce Research Centers support research that helps decision-makers at the federal, state, and local levels understand health workforce needs. However, HRSA cannot operate a nursing focused research center because HRSA has operationalized PHS Act section 761(c) by interpreting the phrase, "under this title," to refer to Title VII of the PHS Act, which does not have a nursing focus.*

*This proposal gives HRSA clear authority to fund a nursing-focused center to expand the evidence base and help coordinate a national strategy to address the nursing shortage. This proposal also expands coordination and support for state-based nursing workforce centers.*

This policy is consistent with the Biden Administration's past efforts to support nurses, and it will strengthen our understanding of the nursing workforce nationally and in each state moving forward.

I look forward to partnering with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress

CC: Xavier Becerra, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
CC: Carole Johnson, Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration