

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## HB 2007

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As of February 22, 2022

**Title:** An act relating to establishing a nurse educator loan repayment program under the Washington health corps.

**Brief Description:** Establishing a nurse educator loan repayment program under the Washington health corps.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Slatter, Cody, Bergquist, Goodman, Leavitt, Peterson, Ramel, Ryu, Santos, Senn, Tharinger, Chopp, Macri, Bateman, Ormsby, Riccelli, Lekanoff and Pollet.

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/13/22, 97-1.

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/22/22.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Nurse Educator Loan Repayment Program under the Washington Health Corps.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

**Background:** Washington Health Corps. In 2019, the Legislature established the Washington Health Corps. It consists of certain loan repayment and scholarship programs for licensed health professions who meet certain criteria and provide service in underserved communities. These programs are:

- The Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program; and
- The Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program.

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) administers these programs in collaboration with the Department of Health. Both programs provide a maximum loan

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repayment award of \$75,000 for a minimum three-year service obligation of full-time employment. A participant is required to work at least a 24-hour work week and is allowed 40 days per year in leave. If the participant works less than a full-time work schedule, employment may be prorated up to five years. Each program then differs in the type of licensed health professionals and geographic areas of service that may qualify. Both programs are subject to appropriation.

Nursing Quality Assurance Commission. The Nursing Quality Assurance Commission (Commission) is composed of 15 governor-appointed members responsible for approving and overseeing nursing assistant, nursing education and refresher course programs in the state of Washington. Licensing requirements for licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, certified nursing technicians, and advanced registered nurse practitioners are under the jurisdiction of the Commission along with standards of practice, continuing competency, and discipline. The Commission is overseen by the Department of Health.

**Summary of Bill:** Under the Washington Health Corps, the Nurse Educator Loan Repayment Program (NELR Program) is established. A nurse educator teaching for an approved nursing program may qualify. "Nurse educator" is defined as an individual with an advanced nursing degree, beyond a bachelor's degree, that teaches nursing curriculum and is a faculty member for an approved nursing program. All Commission-approved nursing educational programs may be eligible. The WSAC, in consultation with the Department of Health, must further determine selection criteria for nurse educators and for approved nursing programs.

The NELR Program is administered by the WSAC. WSAC must establish annual award amounts, required service obligation, and the collection of payments from participants who fail to complete their service obligation.

Funds appropriated for the NELR Program shall be deposited into the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Fund Account.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: After having a conversation with the president of Bellevue College, Gary Locke, I recognized what a significant issue this is. A few years ago, the Legislature provided funding for nursing educators. Although schools have a long list of students waiting to go into nursing programs, there are not enough nurse educators to expand these programs. An interim committee was convened to discuss

options to deal with the nursing shortage. This bill brings forward one of the recommendations—to make a loan repayment program available to nurse educators.

The House's operating budget proposal includes investment in this program. Not-for-profit higher ed institutions, Independent Colleges of Washington institutions, award half of the nursing degrees in this state. This is a key component of getting more nursing students in the workforce. Strengthening the nurse workforce pipeline is more important than ever. Previous investments from 2019 into these programs have helped. It is more important than ever to increase the number of students that may pursue a nursing education. Loan repayment is an important step in meeting the needs of our healthcare workforce.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Vandana Slatter, Prime Sponsor; Dr. Terri Standish-Kuon, Independent Colleges of Washington; Katharine Weiss, Washington State Nurses Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.