

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5335

As of January 30, 2025

Title: An act relating to establishing the rural nursing education program.

Brief Description: Establishing the rural nursing education program.

Sponsors: Senators Slatter, Harris, Bateman, Chapman, Hasegawa, Holy, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Salomon, Trudeau and Valdez.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/30/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a rural nursing education program to provide distance nursing education and training opportunities and improve quality nursing care for rural areas in Washington State.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Julie Tran (786-7283)

Background: According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, in 2023, more than 60 million Americans—about one-fifth of the U.S. population—live in rural areas and are in need of quality healthcare. There are challenges providing care for people in rural areas, such as limited access to healthcare facilities, a shortage of healthcare professionals, and a lack of access to specialty services.

In 2023, the Legislature appropriated funding for a rural nursing workforce initiative to create a hub and develop a program for students to remain in rural environments while working toward nursing credentials.

Summary of Bill: The Rural Nursing Education Program (program) is established within

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the Department of Health (DOH) to provide distance nursing education, sustain lasting change in rural healthcare nursing education, and improve quality nursing care for underserved rural populations across the state, as well as support services to assist participants in learning, living, and working within their rural communities.

Program Requirements. DOH must:

- develop participant selection criteria, which includes requirements that eligible participants: be eligible to enroll in a nursing education or training program; and have declared an intention to serve in a rural area upon completion of their nursing education or training program;
- develop a program application in collaboration with rural health care community partners, rural hospitals, and participating institutions of higher education (IHEs);
- consult with rural health care community partners in the program's development and those community partners include academic partners, local workforce development councils, the Washington State Board of Nursing, the Washington State Hospital Association, and exclusive bargaining representatives of nursing professions;
- identify, evaluate, and address rural nursing shortages in collaboration with rural health care community partners, including critical access hospitals and other rural hospitals, rural health clinics, federally qualified health centers, long term care facilities, community and behavior health sites, and tribal health systems; and
- design innovative and uniquely tailored models of rural nursing education and clinical experiences, including using remote simulation and learning, in collaboration with participating IHEs and rural health care partners.

Participating rural hospitals and health care facilities are required to:

- establish and update methods to identify and recruit active employees who meet or are likely to meet participant selection criteria and conduct communications and outreach to these potential participants; and
- encourage potential participants to contact the program and a participating IHE for application information.

Participating IHEs are required to:

- establish and update methods to identify and recruit students who meet or are likely to meet participant selection criteria and conduct communications and outreach to these potential participants;
- establish a program cohort within the institution's nursing program for participants; and
- implement innovative and uniquely tailored models of rural nursing education and clinical experiences for participants.

"Rural nursing education" means education and training programs with access to distance nursing education and training opportunities designed to prepare students for initial licensure as registered nurses, provided or developed in collaboration with an institution of higher education and rural community partners.

Reporting Requirements. DOH must submit a preliminary report to the Legislature by November 1, 2026, on the demographics and number of participants, preceptors, and clinical faculty training participants in the program.

DOH must submit a biennial report to the Legislature beginning November 1, 2028, on the program's outcomes. The report must include:

- the number and demographics of participants;
- the number of participants who have completed the program;
- the number of participants who have completed the program and are employed as registered nurses in rural communities;
- the number of preceptors and clinical faculty training participants; and
- the program outcomes, including clinical sites and experiences, satisfaction surveys, and evaluation measures.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 2025.

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: Washington has one of the largest nursing shortages in the country. For many rural families, local hospitals are not just an emergency stop—it's often the only option for preventative care, maternity services, and chronic disease management. When rural hospitals and clinics can't hire enough nurses, the entire community suffers. This bill is about keeping health care close to home, strengthening rural communities, and ensuring every Washingtonian has access to quality care, no matter their zip code. This bill offers an innovative solution by blending online coursework with clinical instruction in a rural setting and connecting health care agencies in need of nurses with academic programs that train them. This will strengthen the local health care system.

OTHER: There are many challenges facing rural health care organizations and this newly proposed program are critical for building a strong nursing pipeline and retaining current nurses by offering new professional development opportunities closer to home. There has been work done to gain more understanding of current employer needs in the rural communities. This bill will codify the rural nursing education program and build upon the Legislature's initial investment and develop this program.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Vandana Slatter, Prime Sponsor; Theresa Bowden, self; Brenda Senger, Rural Nurse Education Program (RNEP); Mike Martinoli; Raelyn Dennis, Coulee Medical Center; Jacqueline Barton True, Washington State Hospital Association.

OTHER: Alison Bradywood, Washington State Board of Nursing; Renee Fullerton, Health Workforce Council; Kelly Shaw, Washington State Department of Health.

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