

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5335

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As of February 26, 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, 2/04/25 [DPS-WM].  
Ways & Means: 2/26/25.

**Brief Summary of First Substitute 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.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5335 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Cleveland, Chair; Orwall, Vice Chair; Muzzall, Ranking Member; Bateman, Chapman, Christian, Harris, Holy, Riccelli, Robinson and Slatter.

**Staff:** Julie Tran (786-7283)

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Monica Fontaine (786-7341)

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**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 (First Substitute):** The Rural Nursing Education Program (program) is established within 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.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE COMMITTEE (First Substitute):**

- Declares an emergency.
- Changes the bill's effective date to July 1, 2025.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 20, 2025.

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

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2025.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Health & Long-Term Care):**

*The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* 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 (Health & Long-Term Care):** 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 (Health & Long-Term Care):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** PRO: This bill should be passed and fully funded. Washington has a nursing shortage and this is an innovative solution to increase the amount of nurses in rural areas. Grow Your Own programs are proven to work. Students in rural communities face difficulties completing their nursing education because of transportation, childcare, and other issues. This would provide support services through their education and build a nursing pipeline. Commuting 90 minutes each way to school is not sustainable.

OTHER: This bill provides an innovative approach to increasing nursing in rural areas. Firsthand accounts show that there are difficulties for students completing their programs due to transportation and childcare. This program would provide online education and allow students to gain clinical experience in their communities.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Theresa Bowden; Brenda Senger, Rural Nursing Education Program (RNEP); Jacqueline Barton True, Washington State Hospital Association; Raelyn Dennis, 2003439961.

OTHER: Alison Bradywood, Washington State Board of Nursing.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.