



House Health and Governmental Operations Committee
House Bill 354 – Maryland Pathway to Nursing, Program and Advisory Committee
February 6, 2024
Support

The Maryland Nurses Association (MNA) strongly supports *House Bill 354- Maryland Pathway to Nursing – Program and Advisory Committee*. The bill creates a program to support nursing students early in their educational career in becoming licensed practical nurses (LPNs).

We are facing a nursing shortage at a crisis level. According to an evaluation by the Maryland Hospital Association, we need 5,000 registered nurses (RNs) and 4,000 licensed practical nurses in today’s workforce in Maryland. In just over 10 years, the shortage is expected to grow to 13,800 RNs and 9,200 LPNs. ⁱ Maryland has been a leader in innovation in health care systems, but our path forward will be challenging because of the nursing shortage.

A Root Cause of the Nursing Shortage: Attrition from Nursing Schools

Addressing the nursing shortage requires a multi-prong strategy to address the root causes of the shortage. One critical problem is attrition from nursing educational programs. Many nursing education programs are full. In the 2016-2020 period, 74% of associate degree programs report turning away qualified applicants. ⁱⁱ Nursing schools are at capacity because of the lack of faculty and clinical placements for students.

“Every nursing student who leaves before completing their courses is not only a loss to the college or university, but also a potential loss to the nursing workforce and community.”

With the shortage of capacity at nursing schools, every student counts. We cannot afford to lose students, yet attrition rates in nursing education programs are as high as 25%. “Every nursing student who leaves before completing their courses is not only a loss to the college or university, but also a potential loss to the nursing workforce and community.” ⁱⁱⁱ

Identifying the Factors Contributing to Attrition from Nursing Schools:

There are multiple factors to attrition from nursing schools. Nursing school attrition rates are high because:

- **Older Students Mean More Family Commitments.** Many nursing students are older, and nursing may be a second career. In community college nursing programs, 42% of students are 30 years of age or older.^{iv} Older students have advantages, as they bring maturity and a depth of experience to their studies. However, older students are also more likely to have family commitments including child care and elder care.^v
- **Working Students Face More Challenges:** Nursing school is rigorous, requiring a significant amount of time to focus on both the didactic and supervised clinical education components. Many nursing students enter the field as certified nursing assistants (CNAs). For these students, “(w)ork hours are patchworks of part-time work coupled with demanding stretches of overtime.”^{vi} Studies show that working more than 15 hours a week increased the risk of failure in nursing school.^{vii}
- **Race factors into high attrition rates.** Attrition rates for nursing school are higher for Black and brown students. The reasons are multi-faceted and include lack of mentors, more challenges with work and family commitments, and a higher likelihood of English being a second language.^{viii}

Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program: Boosting the Success of Nursing Students through Stackable Credentials

The Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program is designed to boost the success of nursing students early in their educational careers. The program will customize supports for students to allow them to complete their (LPN) degree. With an LPN degree, nurses can make meaningful contributions to the nursing field. At the same time, they are better-positioned to complete their pathway to become an RN as they will have: 1) a higher degree of financial security; 2) a firm grounding in the skillset needed for academic success; and 3) clinical experience relevant to their studies. Through a system of “stackable credentials”, individuals can progress in their nursing careers while working.

We ask for a favorable report. The Maryland Pathways to Nursing Program offers an innovative strategy to boost the success of nursing students and reduce the nursing shortage. If we can provide additional information as the Committee considers this important legislation, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

ⁱ *Maryland Nurse Workforce Projections: 2021-2035* (2022). Maryland Hospital Association.
<https://www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/maryland-nurse-workforce-projections-globaldata.pdf>

ⁱⁱ https://www.nln.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/research-statistics/percentage-of-programs-that-turned-away-qualified-applicants-2016-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=2441a10d_0

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.proquest.com/openview/34def0879a504c42609100bdb4b7d8fe/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

^{iv} https://www.nln.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/newsroom/nursing-education-statistics/percentage-of-students-over-age-30-by-program-type-2014-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=c55d10d_0

^v Jeffreys, M.R. (2012). *Nursing student retention: Understanding the process and making a difference*. New York, NY: Springer

^{vi} <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/we-need-to-fix-the-broken-nursing-career-pathwayheres-how/>

^{vii} Carnevale, A. P., & Smith, N. (2018). *Balancing work and learning: Implications for low-income students*. Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.

^{viii} Loftin C, Newman SD, Dumas BP, Gilden G, Bond ML. Perceived barriers to success for minority nursing students: an integrative review. *ISRN Nurs*. 2012;2012:806543. doi: 10.5402/2012/806543. Epub 2012 May 30. PMID: 22701183; PMCID: PMC3369480.