

LONG TERM CARE NURSING WORKFORCE INVESTMENT PROGRAM

HB 2062 by Representative Klick
SB 146 by Senator Beverly Powell

BACKGROUND

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas faced a shortage in its long-term care workforce that threatened quality care and patient safety. The pandemic has exacerbated the threat and it is critical that the Legislature act now to strengthen the long-term care workforce and protect the most vulnerable Texans.

Working in long-term care is rewarding, but recruiting and retaining qualified staff is difficult even in the absence of a virus that poses an extreme risk to providers and the seniors they serve. COVID-19 has made it even more challenging, as the pandemic has devastated long-term care facilities. Due to COVID-19, recent reports have described nursing homes as the most dangerous job in America.

The Critical Workforce Shortage in Long-Term Care

- According to federal data from August 2019, Texas ranked first in the nation in nursing staff shortages in nursing homes, with 256 facilities reporting a shortage.
- In 2017, DSHS reported that long-term care facilities had the highest vacancy rate of any practice area for registered nurses in the state at 18.9%, more than double the vacancy rate of hospitals (8.1%).
- A 2016 study by the Texas Department of State Health Services and the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies showed that the state will be 60,000 nurses short of demand by 2030. In the same study projections show that demand for nurses in long-term care settings (nursing homes) will double between 2015 and 2030.
- Between 2010 and 2030 the number of Texans over 60 will more than double.
- A recent report by The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services projects Texas to have the largest increase in demand for overall long-term services and supports (LTSS) nursing care provided by RNs and LPNs between 2015 and 2030.
- *COVID-19 Intensifies Nursing Home Workforce Challenges (October 2020)*, by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services illustrates the current workforce shortage and the unique impact coronavirus has had on staffing in nursing homes.
- It is estimated that 70% of Americans 65+ will need some form of LTSS in the future.

The workforce shortage in long-term care (which was already growing and has been accelerated by COVID-19) poses a threat to patient safety, as adequate and consistent staffing is the primary indicator of quality care in these settings.

Increased workloads, reports of burnout, and high stress, coupled with growing levels of student loan debt discourages new nurses from pursuing careers in long-term care – resulting in high turnover and vacancy rates. The cost of replacing any employee averages 25% of the salary exacerbating financial strain on nursing homes that are primarily funded by government sources (Medicare and Medicaid).

PURPOSE

HB 2062 and SB 146 establish a long-term care nursing student loan repayment assistance program to be administrated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board specifically for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, Registered Nurses and Licensed Vocational Nurses who meet eligibility criteria for application, including full-time employment by a long-term care facility (nursing home) for at least one year.

The bill stipulates the total amount of loan repayment assistance awarded for this program may not exceed \$6 million in a state fiscal biennium, and \$5,000 per eligible nurse per year. Additionally, the bill authorizes the Higher Education Coordinating Board to solicit and accept gifts and grants from any public or private source for this purpose.

A student loan repayment assistance program available to nurses who work in long-term care will improve quality care for aging Texans, offer more opportunity for new nurses, and generate long-term cost savings for the state.

For additional information:

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