



National Black Nurses Association, Inc.  
8630 Fenton Street, Suite 910, Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Phone: (301) 589-3200 • Fax: (301) 589-3223

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**Immediate Release**

**Media Contact: Faith Janecke**  
**E: [fjanecke@nbna.org](mailto:fjanecke@nbna.org) P: 269-552-8743**

**National Black Nurses Association (NBNA)**  
**Statement on the U.S. Department of Education's Proposed Definition of Professional Degree Programs**

*Exclusion of Nursing Threatens the Future of Healthcare and Student Access for ALL, but most specifically, for Historically Underrepresented Students*

**Silver Spring, MD** - November 18, 2025. The National Black Nurses Association (NBNA) joins the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the broader nursing community in expressing deep concern over the U.S. Department of Education's proposed definition of professional degree programs, which would exclude graduate nursing programs and would not provide student loan access for nurses aspiring to advanced practice roles as Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Anesthetist, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Nurse Scientists, Nurse Educators, and Certified Nurse Midwives.

Despite widespread acknowledgment of the academic rigor and clinical intensity of post-baccalaureate nursing programs, the Department's proposed framework narrowly defines professional programs in a way that excludes nursing, the largest and most trusted profession in the nation.

The framework, developed through the *Reimagining and Improving Student Education (RISE)* Committee negotiated rulemaking process, only recognizes programs that:

- Represent completion of academic requirements for entry-level practice and demonstrate a level of skill beyond the bachelor's degree;
- Are doctoral-level programs requiring at least six years of postsecondary study;
- Lead to professional licensure; and
- Fall within the same four-digit Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, law, theology, and related fields.

While nursing is included within the broader "health professions" CIP series (51), it is not grouped with these other enumerated professional fields resulting in the exclusion of graduate programs that award the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), and the PhD in nursing from this professional degree category.

"This exclusion undermines the vital contributions of post-baccalaureate nursing graduates such as independent providers, organizational leaders, and research innovators who deliver essential care and drive advancements across communities," said the NBNA Health Policy Committee. "By



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disregarding nursing, the Department risks erasing decades of progress toward health equity, workforce diversity, and parity among health professions.”

The NBNA strongly asserts that explicitly including post-baccalaureate nursing education within the definition of professional degree programs is critical to strengthening the nation’s healthcare workforce, ensuring equitable access to financial support, and protecting the well-being of patients and communities nationwide. Exclusion would impose unjust burdens on Black nursing students and other historically underrepresented groups, further exacerbating workforce shortages and health disparities during a time of pressing national need.

As the Department of Education prepares to release its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the NBNA is committed to working with AACN and other allied stakeholders to advocate for nursing’s rightful inclusion in the definition of professional degree programs. The organization urges the Department to recognize the indispensable role of advanced nursing education in meeting the complex and evolving healthcare needs of society.

*“I am profoundly disappointed by the Department of Education’s proposal to exclude nursing from the definition of professional degree programs, as it undermines our profession’s moral and ethical obligation to train a nursing workforce that is equipped to help our nation achieve health equity for all,”* said NBNA President Sheldon D. Fields, PhD, RN, CRNP, FNP-BC, AACRN, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN, FADLN. *“By limiting access to critical student loan resources, the Department places an undue burden on those seeking to enter the nursing profession, particularly students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Nursing is a cornerstone of healthcare delivery and innovation, and its deliberate omission from the professional category is unacceptable. We call upon the Department of Education to rectify this oversight and ensure that nursing is rightfully recognized as a professional degree, with equitable access to the opportunities and support our students deserve.”*

The NBNA will continue to amplify the voices of Black nurses, engage its members, and pursue every available avenue to ensure that nursing remains recognized, respected, and supported as a professional degree pathway vital to the nation’s health. In addition, NBNA will also continue to collaborate with other ethnic minority organizations whose members would also be profoundly impacted by this inequitable and exclusionary decision.

#### **About the National Black Nurses Association**

Founded in 1971, the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA) represents approximately 308,000 Black registered nurses, licensed vocational/practical nurses, and nursing students in 115 chapters across the United States, the Eastern Caribbean, and Africa. NBNA’s mission is to serve as the voice for Black nurses and diverse populations, promoting equity in healthcare and advancing the professional and educational development of nurses worldwide.

For more information, visit [www.nbna.org](http://www.nbna.org)