



**The Honorable Ned Lamont, Governor of Connecticut
The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor
Senate President Pro Tempore Martin M. Looney
Speaker of the House Matt Ritter
Majority and Minority Leaders, Connecticut General Assembly
Governor's Workforce Council
Office of Health Strategy
Office of the Health Advocate
Connecticut General Assembly**

Dear Connecticut State Leaders,

On behalf of the undersigned health professional organizations across Connecticut, we write to express deep concern regarding the proposed changes to graduate student loan eligibility emerging from the U.S. Department of Education negotiated rule-making process. The professions excluded from higher loan limits account for approximately 82% of Connecticut's healthcare workforce. This proposal will deepen existing workforce shortages in critical care areas, including mental health care, primary care, care in rural areas, rehabilitation, maternal and infant health, and the faculty needed to educate the next generation of healthcare providers.

Urgent Action Needed

We respectfully ask you to join us in taking action at the federal and state level.

Federal Action

We ask you to contact Under Secretary Kent to advocate for the Department of Education to recognize **Nursing, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Physician Associate, and Dental Hygiene** in its proposed definition of 'professional degree' programs. Recognition of these fields alongside other healthcare disciplines is essential to ensure continued access to graduate education AND meet the growing healthcare needs of the citizens in Connecticut.

Connecticut Action

We ask you to take steps to protect the future healthcare workforce by using CT resources to mitigate the impact of H.R. 1 on federal graduate loans AND remove legislative and regulatory barriers that prevent health professionals from practicing at the top of their education and license.



The State's Investments at Risk

Clinical shortages already strain every corner of the healthcare system, and Connecticut cannot afford actions that make healthcare education less accessible or more expensive. The state has pursued a strategic, multi-year plan to strengthen its healthcare workforce, including investments such as:

- **\$35 million** to grow nursing and social work programs
- The **Health Horizons initiative**, providing **1,600 scholarships** and funding **73 new faculty**
- Over **\$250 million annually** in hospital workforce investments
- New laws to increase clinical training slots and streamline licensure

However, the federal proposal under H.R. 1 threatens to undermine these efforts. It lowers federal borrowing limits, imposes lifetime caps on graduate loans based on professional designation, and makes significant changes to programs such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness. Together, these changes would make graduate education less accessible for many future healthcare professionals.

The Impact of These Changes

Adds Another Threat to Workforce Pipelines in Critical Roles and Specialties

Health professionals across multiple disciplines provide essential care in areas such as mental health, primary care, anesthesia services, maternal and infant health, rehabilitation and rural communities.

- These professions require graduate-level education for licensure.
- New loan caps will significantly restrict who can afford to enter these professions.
- New loan caps fail to account for rising cost of living for graduate students.
- Access to professional education will increasingly be limited to students with substantial financial means, negatively affecting workforce diversity.
- Lifetime loan caps will also limit second-career professionals and discourage graduate-trained professionals from pursuing advanced education in areas such as public health, leadership, and healthcare administration.

Threatens the Faculty Pipeline and Access to Educational Programs

Graduate programs may experience declining enrollment, leading to fewer student slots. With fewer graduate-trained professionals, programs will struggle to recruit and sustain



the faculty needed to educate future healthcare providers, further constraining workforce capacity.

Worsens Workforce Shortages

The proposed rule will deepen shortages across the segment of the workforce that represents 82% of the Connecticut's healthcare professionals, limiting the state's ability to meet the needs of its residents.

Creates Barriers for Second-Career Healthcare Workers

Lifetime loan caps will disproportionately affect second-career professionals and those seeking additional education to expand their contributions to healthcare.

The Bottom Line

Connecticut's multi-year investment in its healthcare workforce, spanning state agencies, higher education institutions, and hospitals, will be compromised if students are unable to access affordable graduate education financing. A robust, well-funded workforce pipeline is essential to the health of our communities.

We respectfully ask you to join us in:

Federal Action

Contacting Under Secretary Kent to advocate for the Department of Education to include Nursing, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Physician Associate, and Dental Hygiene in its proposed definition of 'professional degree' programs.

Connecticut Action

- Using state resources to mitigate the impact of H.R. 1 on federal graduate loan changes
- Maximizing the healthcare workforce by **removing legislative and regulatory barriers** that restrict professionals from practicing at the top of their education and license, thereby improving access to care.



Sincerely,

Connecticut Nurses Association

Cassandra Esposito, MSN, APRN, President

Kim Sandor, MSN, RN, FNP, Executive Director

Connecticut Association of Nurse Anesthesiology

Terri S. Williams DNAP, CRNA, APRN, President

Connecticut Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Society (CTAPRNS)

Ami Marshall EdD, MSN, APRN, ANP-C, President

Connecticut Academy of Physician Associates

Sheyla Marranca, PA-C, President

Connecticut, American Physical Therapy Association

Maryclaire Capetta, DPT, President

Rachel Pata, PT, DPT, Vice President

Connecticut Speech Language Hearing Association (CSHA)

Julie Zellner, M.S. CCC/SLP, President

Connecticut Chiropractic Physicians Association

Nick Karapasas, DC, President

Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association

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National Association of Social Workers - Connecticut Chapter

Dawn Brown, MSW, Executive Director