

LARSON PUSHES LEGISLATION TO COMBAT NURSING SHORTAGE

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today announced his commitment to advancing legislation that will address the shortage of registered nurses in the United States. Larson is an original co-sponsor of the bill, "The Nursing Reinvestment Act," which will be introduced in the House of Representatives today.

"The shortage of people who are becoming nurses represents a distinct threat to the quality and stability of our healthcare system," said Larson. "Nurses are an important part of the backbone of our healthcare industry, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for healthcare facilities to recruit registered nurses, which cause staffing shortages. Fewer and fewer people are completing nursing graduate programs and the age of the nursing workforce is growing steadily higher. Right now it is absolutely necessary for action to be taken to reverse this trend, and protect the strength of our healthcare system." The legislation that Larson is co-sponsoring would:

- Expand Medicare and Medicaid funding for nursing education. This would expand the Medicare payments for nurse education to reimburse hospitals for the costs associated with training nurses in hospital-affiliated programs. This would include federally qualified community health centers, rural health clinics, nursing homes, home health care agencies, hospices and long-term care facilities.
- Establish nursing recruitment grants. These grants would support outreach programs in schools, provide assistance to colleges and universities for remedial education for nursing students, as well as provide stipends for transportation and childcare.
- Establish a career ladder grant program. This would assist individuals in the nursing workforce to receive more education, and establish partnerships between health care providers and schools for advanced training.
- Establish a "Nurse Corps." This would provide educational scholarships in exchange for commitment to serve in a public or private non-profit health facility determined to have a critical shortage of nurses.
- Establish grants for health career academics. This would create partnerships between health care facilities, nursing schools, and high schools to create high school curricula in nursing training.
- Establish grants for nursing school faculty development. This would provide for scholarships, loans, and monthly stipends to BSN graduates and Master's students to allow full-time study and rapid completion of doctoral studies. In exchange for receiving assistance, recipients would be obligated to spend a certain amount of time in a faculty position at a school of nursing.
- Establish a public service campaign. The public service campaign would advertise and promote the nursing profession and educate the public about the rewards of a nursing career.

The bill would also direct the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish rules for making payments to non-hospital based, federally certified hospice programs and home health agencies for the costs of providing nurse training between the fiscal years of 2002 and 2006. The bill also reauthorizes and modifies the federal Medicaid match for nursing home clinical education of nurses to provide 90 percent of state costs through 2006.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 10 years, roughly 40 percent of the nursing workforce will be over 50 years old, and right now, the number of registered nurses who are under 35 years old has dipped to 18.3 percent. The number of graduates of nursing graduate programs in the United States fell 13.6 percent between 1995 and 1999.

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To read the Dept. of Health and Human Services Report, The Registered Nurse Population, visit <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov>

The Connecticut Department of Public Health submitted a report in December 2000 to the Connecticut State Legislature entitled: "Study Concerning the Shortage of Nurses in Connecticut."