



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
323 State Street, Augusta, ME 04330-7131  
(207) 629-4000 | Fax (207) 629-4048 | mccs.me.edu

TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: David Daigler, President

RE: Statement in support of LD 1807, An Act to Expand Nursing Education Programs

DATE: February 22, 2022

---

A report issued by the Maine Nursing Action Coalition (MeNAC) projected that the state could have a shortage of 3,200 registered nurses by 2025. That report was published in 2017, and MeNAC's projections did not include the impact of a two-year pandemic. In May of 2021, the American Nurses Association issued a report on *The Impact of COVID-19 on the Nursing Workforce*, saying, "The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and negative impact on the nursing workforce." The report went on to say, "Immediate and long-term actions must be taken to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic."

The nursing shortage we face is not a result of COVID-19, though the pandemic has exasperated it. It will not go away when the pandemic subsides.

As we discuss this legislation, hospitals are filling nursing vacancies with costly visiting nurses. When staffing needs cannot be met, hospitals are forced to redirect elective care patients to out-of-state hospitals or delay non-emergency care.

The pandemic has stressed our critical nursing workforce to its brink. Our nurses have been at the front line of this pandemic. They are exhausted and in desperate need of replenishment.

So, with Maine experiencing an unprecedented shortage of healthcare professionals, Maine's community colleges stand ready to help.

MCCS has already moved forward with short-term training for CNAs, LPNs, Medical Assistants, Phlebotomists, and other health professionals that can be appropriately trained through the short-term programs that have been funded through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan.

Registered nurses require licenses to practice, and, as a requirement of licensure, nurses must have a degree from an accredited institution. They must also pass the National Council on Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN). To sit for the exam, the nurse candidate must have a degree from an accredited institution. MCCS colleges are accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), and our five current nursing programs are also accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). ACEN standards require sustainable funding to maintain accreditation.

With five fully accredited nursing programs, and a sixth program scheduled to begin in fall 2022, MCCS is uniquely positioned to help address Maine's nursing shortage.

MCCS's five current nursing programs all rank in the top eight programs in the state. MCCS's pass rates for all five programs average 93.6 percent, and each MCCS nursing program has a higher pass rate than the state average, which is 89.1 percent.

The 2-year associates degree option offered by Maine's community colleges requires the least time for nurse candidates to earn their degree, sit for the board exam and enter the workforce as a registered nurse. With the lowest tuition rate in New England, MCCS also has the most cost-efficient path to becoming a registered nurse.

MCCS has a current annual nursing enrollment of approximately 576 nursing students (a combination of first- and second-year students) with an average of 209 graduates each year over the last four years (AY18, 193; AY19, 189; AY20, 218; and AY21, 236). Currently, MCCS's nursing programs are full, and without additional, sustained funding, we cannot increase capacity while satisfying accreditation and nursing board standards.

MCCS has developed detailed plans to double our capacity and graduate an additional 210 nurse candidates per year. However, nursing education is expensive, driven by the Nursing Board's requirement that one nurse educator can only oversee eight nursing students in clinical rotation.

Increasing the number of nursing seats available to Maine's residents is a benefit to the state's healthcare providers and the livelihood of Maine citizens. The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates the average salary for registered nurses in Maine ranges from \$56,000 to \$78,000. Demand for nurses is causing the average salary to increase rapidly. Expanding our nursing programs creates an opportunity for more Mainers to train for meaningful, good-paying jobs.

Maine's community colleges have built this expansion plan in partnership with the leading healthcare systems in the state. The colleges will hire a total of 33 full-time and 20 part-time nursing faculty. We will add 7 support staff, including clinical coordinators and lab technicians. The colleges will also expand simulation labs and purchase additional laboratory equipment, including simulation manikins, computers, monitors, hospital beds, and consumable supplies.

Our hospital partners will provide additional funding and in-kind cost support equal to an additional \$2,500,000. That funding will be applied exclusively to costs directly attributable to the expansion of our nursing programs. The hospital partners will also expand clinical placements for MCCS students and provide preceptors as needed.

With these commitments, MCCS is prepared to have our first class of new nurse candidates begin their instruction this coming summer (2022). "Shovel ready" seems a poor term for expanding this critical group of desperately needed medical professionals, but understand this program is fully built and ready to start as soon as the financial commitments are in place.

There is no single answer to fully addressing the shortage of registered nurses we face, but one key piece of the solution is expanding our capacity to build the skills people need to deliver that care. If we find the courage to do that, we have a starting point.

We respect your workload, and we have suggested that supporters of this legislation -- and hopefully some students -- provide written testimony to the Committee or as part of the supplemental budget process. However, some have chosen to participate in this hearing in-person because, like us, they believe it is critical that LD 1807 be supported and fully funded.

Thank you.