Alabama Board of Nursing Insights

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The Alabama Board of Nursing

INSIGHTS

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No APRN Compact for Alabama in 2024; More Cooperation Needed in the Future

Peggy Sellers Benson, MSN, RN, MSHA, NE-BC Executive Officer



As you are aware, the Alabama Board of Nursing (ABN) continues to pursue avenues to expand access to care for Alabama patients and to the rural community. We have completed an extensive review of the proposed national compact for advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) and support the introduction of legislation to establish an APRN Compact in Alabama.

The APRN Compact is similar to the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), which applies exclusively to RN and LPN licensure. The APRN Compact would allow advanced practice nurses in states that join the Compact to practice freely in any other APRN Compact state. This could offer an effective means for employers and facilities across Alabama to recruit and retain APRNs to address critical staffing issues as our nation continues to suffer from the ongoing nursing shortage. The ABN staff has led discussion among stakeholders, including elected officials, employers, APRNs, and nursing advocacy organizations throughout the state of Alabama and discussed potential legislation seeking approval from the Alabama Legislature and Governor Ivey for Alabama to join the APRN Compact.







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Unfortunately, following these extensive discussions, the various voices of advanced practice nursing in the state were unable to achieve consensus on the APRN Compact. As of today, no nursing organization has stepped forward to lead this initiative and advocate for passage. In the future, nursing as a whole must learn to work together for the common good of everyone. Nurses make powerful patient advocates and nurses from all APRN practice roles and organizations must set aside their differences and become effective public advocates.

The ABN encourages all nursing organizations to come together to establish an APRN/Nursing Coalition to lead a APRN Compact initiative for the future. We are here to encourage, support, and assist in any way we can, to ensure we continue to move nursing practice forward for the future.

To each of you reading this, I encourage you to get involved in your nursing professional, specialty, or other organizations, as well as your communities, and advocate for the healthcare issues that stir passion in you. Alabama patients count on you every day to ensure their health and comfort. Only through active, purposeful engagement can you promote best practices for the future.



Honor L. Ingels Chief Policy/Communications Officer

With the 2024 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature set to convene on Tuesday, February 6, the Alabama Board of Nursing (ABN) will once again be advocating for changes to the Alabama Nurse Practice Act. As usual, these changes are designed to improve the services the ABN provides to our licensees and to advance access to quality patient care in the state.

This year, the Board will be supporting two pieces of legislation, and we anticipate that the primary sponsor of each bill will be Senator April Weaver (R-Brierfield), who also is a licensed registered nurse. Following is a summary of the bills, as well as an explanation of the rationale for each:



Legislation addressing an error in the statute establishing the Loan Repayment Program for Advanced Practice Nursing

The Loan Repayment Program for Advanced Practice Nursing (Loan Program) was established by the Legislature in 2016 and has been a tremendous success. In essence, the Loan Program provides loans of up to \$15,000.00 to students and recent graduates of advanced practice nursing programs preparing Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNPs), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), and Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs).



Honor L. Ingels Chief Policy/Communications Officer

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In exchange, each recipient agrees to practice as a CRNP, CRNA, or CNM in an "area of critical need" in the state for a period of 18 months for each annual loan received. Since 2016, the program has provided more than \$3 million and has placed dozens of qualified advanced practice nurses in rural communities throughout Alabama.

However, during the 2023 Regular Session, the ABN identified a need to address provider shortfalls that are not defined as rural, as the original legislation required. Accordingly, Senator Weaver successfully sponsored legislation to add provider shortage areas and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to the definition of "Area of Critical Need." This important change will enhance access to quality providers for thousands of additional Alabamians.

Unfortunately, however, a technical error in the drafting of the bill resulted in the use of an inaccurate term in the language of the Act passed by the Legislature. While the error will not prevent proper operation of the Loan Program, it is necessary to take the statute to the Legislature to have the language corrected. As a non-controversial bill, we anticipate no opposition to the legislation during the Regular Session.

Standardization of Education and Regulation of Nursing Support Technicians (NSTs)

Anyone who works in healthcare is familiar with the dozens of types of technicians, or techs, including Patient Care Technicians (PCTs), employed in healthcare facilities. We are broadly referring to these technicians, which receive similar training but use various titles, as Nursing Support Technicians (NSTs). These positions are vital to the quality of patient care provided in facilities throughout the state and the nation, but there is no standard education or credential for these individuals to validate the quality of their preparation for the role.





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This is not to suggest that they are not adequately prepared; the vast majority of employers provide high quality education for NSTs internally, and the vast majority of techs do a wonderful, necessary job. In recent years, conversations in Alabama and around the country have focused on establishing a standard lexicon and educational standards for these roles. This effort would, in turn, provide the individual with a documentable, stackable credential, which could be combined with additional education and documentation to expand his or her professional prospects.

The ABN would like to see Alabama lead the nation in formalizing a system of credentialing for NSTs, and we are asking the Alabama Legislature to give us the authority to do so. With dozens of partners among employers and educators, we are in a unique position to pioneer regulation in this area, which offers tremendous benefits to technicians, employers, and, above all, Alabama patients.

The bill we are proposing will authorize the Board to establish scope and standards of practice for NSTs, and to issue permits to qualified applicants, who would be required to pass a national certification exam. In turn, employers would have more confidence in the preparation of new hires in the role who had previously been trained in other facilities or in a state-approved NST curriculum, which would be administered by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). Meanwhile, the Board and employers would be provided with a system to remediate and screen for those rare individuals who do not practice to the highest professional standards.



Required CE for Collaborative Practice

As most CRNPs and CNMs are aware, rule changes taking effect January 1, 2024 require all collaborative practice nurses to complete a series of ABN-provided continuing education (CE) courses related to collaborative practice in Alabama. This education currently consists of three modules, released this past Spring.

These modules - An Overview of Collaborative Practice in Alabama, The Approval Process for CRNPs and CNMs, and Protocols, Skills, and Professional Responsibilities for CRNPs and CNMs - are available under "Available Online Courses" in the My Profile portal on the ABN website. We encourage all Alabama CRNPs and CNMs to complete these courses at your earliest convenience, as they will be required prior to your next APRN renewal.

Future applicants who may not yet have accounts under My Profile may access the courses under the Advanced Practice CE tab on the ABN website.

Honor L. Ingels Chief Policy/Communications Officer

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For their part, NSTs would be recognized for their preparation and competence, and would be able to document the same as they move forward in their careers. They could potentially even receive credit for previous training as they seek education as nurses or other healthcare providers.

It should be noted that seeking a permit as an NST would be voluntary and that employers would not be required to hire certified NSTs, though many employers indicate that doing so could become an industry standard. The definition of NST would not include Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs), which have separate education requirements and are subject to various federal and state regulatory regimes.

This effort has received tremendous support from nurses, employers, educators, and policy makers, and the ABN anticipates that the bill will be successful. The Legislature may meet over the course of up to 105 calendar days, commencing on February and adjourning in late spring. Each piece of ABN legislation must pass both the Alabama Senate and the House of Representatives and be considered by Governor Kay Ivey prior to passage.





ALABAMA BOARD OF NURSING

> ABN Welcomes One New Board Member; Two Reappointed to Second Term

ABAM

Effective January 1, 2024, Governor Kay Ivey has appointed one new RN member, as well as reappointing two existing members to their second terms in office:

New Member – Sabria Danielle Baker, DNP, RN, CNE

Danielle Baker serves in a Nursing Education position on the Board, succeeding outgoing Board member Valorie Dearmon. She has extensive experience as a nurse educator in the state.

Reappointed – Louise C. O'Keefe, PhD, CRNP, CNE

Louise O'Keefe was reappointed to her Nursing Education position. Dr. O'Keefe currently serves as Associate Dean for Graduate Programs in the University of Alabama in Huntsville School of Nursing.

Reappointed – Cherry D. Rodgers, LPN

Governor Ivey reappointed Ms. Rodgers to her AFLPN position on the Board. Ms. Rodgers has enjoyed a distinguished career in clinical practice.

Members of the Board of Nursing serve four-year terms, and may be appointed to two consecutive terms. The Board's new members' terms expire on December 31, 2027.



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