

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

March 19, 2024

Addressing California Nursing Shortages

Across the State of California, nursing shortages continue to impact healthcare delivery. This is acutely felt in Los Angeles County, which is in significant need of nursing professionals to address the multiple health crises facing the County. These shortages have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a significant proportion of the nursing workforce leave the healthcare industry. According to the Hospital Association of Southern California, in 2023 nursing vacancy rates among local hospitals exceeded 30 percent, whereas prior to the pandemic the average vacancy rate was 6 percent. According to the UC San Francisco Health Workforce Research Center on Long-Term Care, California faces a shortage of about 36,000 licensed nurses. In 2018, more than 85 percent of hospitals in California reported that the demand for RN’s was greater than the available supply – a situation that has not improved.

Burnout has also played a significant role in nursing hours worked, with data from a statewide survey conducted in 2022 showing nurses cut back on the number of hours

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worked per week since 2020, with nearly half of the workforce reporting symptoms of burnout. This perpetuates a cycle experienced by existing nurses, with those remaining having to do more work to address the shortages, ending up getting burned out, and ultimately leaving the industry as well, further exacerbating the problem.

These nursing shortages also impact the County's critical healthcare operations. The Department of Health Services (DHS) reports a 15 percent nursing vacancy rate, in line with the national average for 2023. To help address this rate, DHS is partnering with the County's College of Nursing and Allied Health (CONAH), which plays an important role in training new nurses. The class of 2023 featured 44 graduates across diverse backgrounds who will go on to provide culturally appropriate nursing care and services to patients across the County. Thirty eight percent of graduates come from Latino backgrounds, and 40 percent are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. However, additional support is needed across other academic institutions to address these shortages.

In 2010, the National Academy of Medicine issued its Future of Nursing Report, containing a set of recommendations including that the proportion of Registered Nurses (RN) with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree increase by 80 percent in 2020. This goal was not met, but there has been an increased push by credentialing organizations to meet that goal. In California, a 2021 Health Impact report found that 18 percent of California hospitals stated that a BSN was required for employment, doubling the rate of the year before, and 54.3 percent reported a preference for hiring nurses with a BSN. The demand BSN-credentialed RNs continues to increase without a corresponding increase in the capacity to train them at public nursing schools.

To address this capacity shortfall, Senator Richard D. Roth has introduced Senate Bill (SB) 895, which would authorize the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to select up to 15 community college districts with an existing nationally accredited Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Community colleges operating these programs already have the needed experience, with ADN students completing all of the clinical nursing courses required for licensure as a Registered Nurse in California. The only difference between an ADN and RN program consists of an additional 30 units of humanities/management coursework and one post-RN licensure public health work assignment in clinical settings. No additional supervised clinical placement slots are utilized in pursuit of a BSN degree. Thus, there is an opportunity to utilize existing ADN programs to address this critical workforce shortage. With SB 895, 15 community college districts with existing nationally accredited programs will be able to offer a BSN degree, prioritizing programs in underserved nursing areas across the State.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office – Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch (CEO-LAIR) to support Senate Bill 895.

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