

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4003

February 5, 2026

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

Thank you for your steadfast dedication to the American people and your leadership in advancing President Trump's America First agenda at the Department of Education. I am also grateful for the opportunity to have met you previously and raised this issue in person.

As an advanced practice nurse with a doctorate degree and board certifications as a Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP), I am concerned about, and seek clarification regarding the Department's interpretation and implementation of 20 U.S.C. § 1087e, as amended by Public Law 119-21 (H.R. 1, 119th Cong.), which governs federal student loan limits for graduate and professional students. Specifically, I urge the Department to include Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) programs, including Nurse Practitioner (NP) programs, as professional degree programs for loan limit purposes, consistent with statutory language and congressional intent in Public Law 119-21.

Under the amendments to 20 U.S.C. § 1087e, effective July 1, 2026, federal unsubsidized Stafford loan limits for students in graduate and professional programs depend on whether the student is enrolled in a "graduate" program or a "professional" program. The statute distinguishes these categories by the type of credential awarded and defines "professional student" in a manner that reflects professional practice orientation and licensure preparation: a "professional student" is enrolled in a program that awards a professional degree or provides specified professional training.¹ Congress specifically used the term professional degree as defined in regulation under 34 CFR § 668.2 at the time the bill was enacted. That regulation states that a professional degree is one that "signifies both completion of the academic requirements for beginning practice in a given profession and a level of professional skill beyond that normally required for a bachelor's degree." Professional licensure is also generally required. Examples of a professional degree include but are not limited to Pharmacy (Pharm.D.), Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.), Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.), Law (L.L.B.

¹ As amended, 20 U.S.C. § 1087e(b)(B)(ii) defines "professional student" as a student enrolled in a program of study that "(I) awards a professional degree upon completion of the program; or (II) provides the training described in part 141 of title 14, Code of Federal Regulations (or any successor regulations)." The statute further establishes differing annual and aggregate federal unsubsidized Stafford loan limits for "graduate" students and "professional" students based on this definition.

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

or J.D.), Medicine (M.D.), Optometry (O.D.), Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.), Podiatry (D.P.M., D.P., or Pod.D.), and Theology (M.Div. or M.H.L.).”

As a supporter of H.R. 1, which was championed by President Trump, I am disheartened by a proposed rule that contradicts congressional intent. Rather than maintaining the established open-ended list of professional degrees, the Department now seeks to restrict that definition exclusively to the examples listed. Despite claiming an intent to limit these programs, the Department has inconsistently added one provider while barring others, such as APRNs, that otherwise meet all requirements. Further, in the Department’s recent Notice of Proposed Rulemaking under docket ED-2025-OPE-0944-0001, the Department states:

“Professional degree programs are limited to certain fields as specified in this rule, and programs such as nursing advanced practice degrees are considered graduate-level programs, not professional-level programs.”

This characterization misrepresents the advanced nursing profession. APRN and NP programs are clinically intensive, licensure-qualifying professional programs whose graduates provide advanced clinical care across primary care, critical care, emergency care, mental health, and underserved settings. In rural communities such as those across South Carolina’s Third Congressional District, APRNs and NPs often serve as the primary or only source of accessible healthcare, making the financial viability of these training programs directly tied to patient access and community health outcomes.

The Department’s current interpretation results in a lower applicable loan limit, materially disadvantages students pursuing these essential healthcare careers, and diverges from the statutory focus on professional practice orientation and credentialing embedded in the U.S. Code. These students would now have difficulty in living out their calling to care for some of our nation’s most vulnerable, particularly our senior citizens and veterans.

Historically, President Trump has prioritized removing barriers for NPs. His first administration’s Executive Order 13890 on *Protecting and Improving Medicare for Our Nation’s Seniors* specifically directed the removal of Medicare requirements that exceed state or federal laws and prevent NPs from practicing at the top of their licenses.² Furthermore, a joint report from HHS, Treasury, and Labor called for removing barriers to care for APRNs and other clinicians, and highlighted the anticompetitive nature of restrictive clinician policies.³ This commitment has continued through the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) and was reinforced by President Trump, Secretary Kennedy, and Dr. Oz during the “Great, Historic Investment in Rural Health Roundtable.”⁴

In contrast to these coordinated efforts to expand access and reduce regulatory burdens on advanced practice providers, the Department’s proposed rule represents a significant divergence in policy.

² [Executive Order on Protecting and Improving Medicare for Our Nation’s Seniors – The White House](#)

³ [Reforming America’s Healthcare System Through Choice and Competition](#)

⁴ [Search Results Detail | Grants.gov](#)

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the Department revise its regulatory interpretation of 20 U.S.C. § 1087e to treat APRN and NP programs as professional degree programs for federal student loan purposes. This clarification would align implementation with statutory language, congressional intent to support professional workforce development, and the operational realities of advanced nursing education. I hope this oversight can be corrected promptly and that it is not an intentional policy aimed at limiting access to critical healthcare services in rural communities.

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment to serving our nation's students, teachers, and healthcare workforce.

America First,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheri Biggs".

Sheri Biggs

Member of Congress