

Congress Steps in to Protect Loan Access for Nursing Students

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Summary by Bloomberg AI

- Nursing groups secured a small win with a provision in a domestic spending bill that qualifies graduate nursing students for higher loan allowances, challenging a Trump administration rule.
- The rule, which goes into effect July 1, limits access to federal student loans for certain healthcare-related degrees by designating only 11 degrees as “professional” and imposing more stringent limits on “graduate” programs.
- House lawmakers advanced the spending bill, which includes language stating that funds cannot be used to administer federal student aid programs in a manner that does not designate advanced nursing programs as professional degree programs.

Nursing groups have secured a small win from House appropriators in their bid to challenge a Trump administration rule that limits access to federal student loans for a litany of healthcare-related degrees.

House lawmakers advanced out of committee Tuesday a domestic spending bill covering the Education, Health, and Labor Departments for fiscal year 2027 that includes a provision qualifying graduate nursing students for higher loan allowances.

The GOP’s 2025 tax-and-spending law created new federal student **loan caps** and split advanced degree programs into two categories: students in “graduate” programs face more stringent limits than “professional” students. The Education Department’s rule implementing the changes only designates 11 degrees as “professional.”

The rule goes into effect July 1, and **various groups** are seeking a preliminary injunction from the courts blocking its implementation before then. The spending bill

covering the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1 still needs a Senate counterpart and won't be finished before the effective date.

The spending bill amendment approved by voice vote Tuesday states: "None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to administer Title IV federal student aid programs in a manner that does not designate advanced nursing programs as professional degree programs."

House Appropriations ranking member Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) led the bid to include the language. The administration's rule "will limit the financial aid available to future nurses and restrict their ability to pursue advanced degrees that would help them become better practitioners and pursue better care for their patients," DeLauro said in a statement.

'Professional' Degrees

Several lawsuits **challenging** the administration's rule and its definition of "professional" degrees are making their way through the courts. Most are led by **nursing** and **physician assistant** trade groups.

At issue is the Education Department's interpretation of "professional," which they argue runs counter to what Congress intended in last year's major tax-and-spending law. They say that has led to the unlawful exclusion of advanced nursing and physician assistant degrees from that category.

The 2025 law points to the existing definition of "professional degrees" in the **federal regulations** that **govern education**. That definition lays out a three-part test, which the groups argue nursing and physician assistant programs pass.

- They must signify completion of the academic requirements for beginning practice in a given profession;
- Require a level of professional skill beyond what is normally required for a bachelor's degree;
- Require professional licensure to practice.

Based on the department's additional criteria—including that the degree must generally be at the doctoral level—just 11 programs qualify under the rule: law, veterinary

medicine, pharmacy, podiatry, medicine, chiropractic, clinical psychology, optometry, osteopathic medicine, theology, and dentistry.

The Education Department in [recent court filings](#) says it based the final rule on the 10 examples of degrees included in the existing federal definition. Most are doctorates.

The department “did not exceed the bounds of statutory interpretation by interpreting ‘professional degree’ to include degrees with characteristics common to those degrees in the list,” one administration filing reads.

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