



**Kansas Hospital
ASSOCIATION**

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Jaron Caffrey, Director of Workforce and Health Care Policy
DATE: March 6, 2024
RE: House Bill 2645 – Proponent

The Kansas Hospital Association appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding House Bill 2645.

The Kansas Hospital Association’s annual vacancy and turnover survey has indicated that 2022 was the highest year for Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) vacancies at 25% and Registered Nurse (RN) vacancies at a high of 21%. Health care organizations are actively engaged in numerous efforts to improve recruitment and retention to mitigate the workforce challenges we face, but one key element that can still be addressed is increasing the number of students entering nursing schools and thus entering the nursing workforce pipeline. That is why we are pleased to support House Bill 2645.

This bill would enact reforms to the Kansas Nursing Service Scholarship Program by removing the cap on number of scholarships awarded annually and reforming the sponsorship requirement to open the usability of this program while providing a higher incentive for students seeking to work for health care employers in Rural Opportunity Zones following graduation. This proposal continues to advance on the progress made in recent years to encourage students to attend school in Kansas and remain living and working in Kansas post-graduation in career areas that are of high demand to Kansas employers.

While there are hundreds of students that apply for this scholarship program annually, only a fraction of those applicants actually receive an award. Part of this is due to the existing program requiring an employer sponsor for every student to obtain a scholarship. However, Kansas hospitals have successfully used this scholarship to hire students following their graduation while supporting them in paying for their college education.

KHA supports the removal of the cap of 250 awards per year. The changes that this bill proposes could easily allow hundreds of students to benefit from this program and thereby be committed to working in Kansas following their graduation. Initiatives like this that can capture students for a few years following the completion of their education makes it much more likely for them to remain in Kansas for the long-term, which promotes a more stable workforce and benefits our communities large and small.

The KHA also supports increasing student enrollment in our state’s nursing programs, and initiatives to encourage nursing graduates to reside and practice within Kansas. This starts with making it easier for students to finance their nursing education as this is a key barrier to overcome for students across the state.

We are appreciative of the Kansas Board of Regents in working with us on the sponsorship component of this bill to reform the sponsorship to still allow rural employers to participate without making it a requirement for all students. This bill works towards increasing the workforce pipeline that recognizes the special needs of rural Kansas. The changes in this bill will continue the incentive of having an employer sponsor with a focus on the vast majority of Kansas counties that are Rural Opportunity Zones and additionally open the program up for those students that may not secure a sponsor during nursing school.

It remains crucial for industry and education to work hand in hand to ensure we provide opportunities for those seeking to advance themselves and their careers by obtaining a post-secondary degree, particularly in the field of nursing that is a foundation of the health care workforce. This is a step in the right direction to help build the supply of our workforce.

We hope that the committee will recommend favorably for passage HB 2645. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.