



January 13, 2026

The Honorable Mike Lawler
324 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: H.R. 6718, *Professional Student Degree Act*

Dear Representative Lawler:

On behalf of the 100,000+ registered nurses dedicated to excellence in patient care, education, research, and administration in oncology nursing, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) thanks you for your introduction of the *Professional Student Degree Act*. This important legislation would codify the definition of “professional degree” and clarify which graduate programs meet the criteria.

In late November 2025, the U.S. Department of Education announced its exclusion of nursing degrees from its definition of “professional degree program.” Under new federal loan limits—\$20,500 per year and \$100,000 total for graduate programs, and \$50,000 per year and \$200,000 total for professional degree programs—many post-baccalaureate nursing students would surpass the aggregate cap if their programs were categorized as graduate rather than professional. Students in accelerated entry-level master’s programs may also be constrained by the annual borrowing limits if their programs are not classified as professional degrees. The law also requires institutions to prorate annual loan amounts in direct proportion to the percent of full-time status the student is enrolled, further limiting access to funding for nursing students who pursue furthering their education while still working.

The U.S. is projected to face a shortage of nurses through 2037. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the nation will need approximately 31,900 new advanced practice registered nurses each year through 2032 to meet patient demand, while nursing school faculty shortages are limiting student capacity. Over 65,000 qualified candidates were turned away from nursing programs in 2023 primarily due to an insufficient number of faculty. Implementation of the student financial aid provisions as proposed would limit the number of individuals who can afford to advance their education. Less advanced degree nurses entering the field will exacerbate and further compound the current nursing shortage, as fewer nurse faculty will limit the number of program spots available for future nurse practitioners.

ONS thanks you for your leadership and stands ready to work with you and your staff to ensure equitable access to federal loans for nursing students. We would be happy to discuss ways in which ONS may be of assistance in this endeavor and would encourage you to contact Erica Fischer-Carlidge, DNP, RN, AOCNS, EBP-C, Chief Clinical Officer, at healthpolicy@ons.org. We look forward to engaging in an ongoing dialogue to address issues of importance to our cancer patients and ways in which we can promote public health.

Sincerely,

The Oncology Nursing Society

About ONS: The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) is a professional organization of over 35,000 registered nurses and other health care providers dedicated to excellence in patient care, education, research, and administration in oncology nursing. ONS members are a diverse group of professionals who represent a variety of professional roles, practice settings, and subspecialty practice areas. Oncology nurses are leaders in the health care arena, committed to continuous learning and leading the transformation of cancer care by advocating for high quality care for people with cancer.