

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

A2480

By Assemblymember Morelle

S294

By Senator Alesi

AN ACT to amend the Education Law, in relation to the educational preparation for the practice of professional nursing

The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) supports the above-referenced legislation, which would require registered professional nurses (RNs) to attain bachelor's degrees in nursing (BSN) within ten years of their initial licensure as a criterion for re-registration to practice in New York state. This legislation adds an amendment to subsection 6905, subdivision (2) of the Education Law and was modeled after the education requirement for public school teachers in New York State, in which teachers are required to earn master's degrees within five years of initial certification.

The nursing profession's educational history is rich with opportunities for career advancement. Since the introduction of associate degree programs in the 1950s, thousands of nurses have entered the nursing profession through this level of education. Associate degree programs prepare graduate nurses to sit for the NCLEX-RN (national licensing exam) and to begin functioning competently as novice nurses.

Bachelor's degree programs provide additional emphasis on key areas of nursing theory and the use of evidence-based data in nursing practice. Typically, BSN students are exposed to settings and areas of practice that are not part of associate degree programs, such as public health, home care, and other outpatient settings. The BSN curriculum provides students with leadership skills that enable them to better supervise and monitor dependent practitioners such as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP).

The increasing complexity of technology, medications and treatments, and chronic health conditions (in all age groups) underscores the need for nurses to continue their education. The changing environment and consumer expectations emphasize the need to reevaluate nursing education. A strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences strengthens the analytical and critical thinking skills needed for safe, culturally competent care. These skills, which are further developed through BSN programs, better prepare RNs to seek process improvements that address medical errors and other challenges in the healthcare delivery system. With the shift toward providing care in home-based settings instead of institutions, bachelor's-prepared RNs will be better equipped to meet this population's needs.

Due to the increasing complexity of patient care, in a report to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice urged that two thirds of the basic nurse workforce hold bachelor's or higher degrees in nursing by 2010. According to the 2002 State Education Department survey, 56% of RNs in New York have BSN degrees or higher.

Language in this legislation will exempt nurses who are already registered in New York State as well as nursing students who are enrolled in associate degree or nursing diploma programs at the time of enactment. It is expected that these RNs will participate in lifelong learning through continuing education courses and certifications, as many nurses do now. Currently, however, continuing education coursework is not a requirement for re-registration in New York State.

For nurses who are affected by this requirement in the future, the increased accessibility of distance learning programs will afford them greater flexibility in furthering their education, despite busy work schedules and other life commitments. Institutions with BSN programs are already making accommodations for associate degree and diploma-prepared RNs by accepting their nursing credits without requiring validating exams. Additionally, the legislation allows nurses to obtain a conditional registration if they fail to complete the bachelor's degree within the ten-year period.

New York State is recognized throughout the nation for its high standards in health care and education. With this in mind, NYSNA supports the enactment of legislation that would expand the education requirement for the profession of nursing.