

HB

211



# Alaska State Legislature

*Representative Peggy Wilson  
Putting Alaska's Families First*

## **SPONSOR STATEMENT – CSHB 211 (HESS)** **Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program**

Alaska and the nation are experiencing a severe shortage of nurses. HB 211, which establishes the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program, could help to change that. The program would offer up to \$2,000 per year, not to exceed \$10,000 total for nurses to repay nursing loans. Hopefully this incentive will attract new nurses to the state and encourage Alaskans to pursue their nursing vocations here in Alaska.

In 2002, the Alaska Colleagues in Caring, in collaboration with the Alaska Hospital and Nursing Home Association, surveyed facilities in Alaska regarding nursing workforce needs. Results showed that vacancy rates for RNs had increased from 5.7% in 2000 to 11.5% in 2002, with increasing vacancy rates projected into the future. Facilities in western and northern Alaska reported a vacancy rate of over 20% and, according to information from other sources; the vacancy rate in some remote areas of Alaska is as high as 35 percent.

To qualify for loan reimbursement, an individual must be hired as a nurse in Alaska on or after July 1, 2003, be licensed to practice as a nurse in Alaska, work as a nurse in the state throughout the loan repayment period, and have outstanding educational loans from a recognized lending institution.

Additional eligibility criteria and guidelines for the loan program will be set in regulations adopted by the Board of Nursing, in consultation with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education. These may include guidelines on establishing priorities for participation in the loan repayment program if funding for the program is not adequate to meet need. The guidelines may include determinations based on areas of the state and nursing specialties affected by shortages,

Funding for the program may be appropriated from the Student Loan Corporation dividend (the return of contributed capital authorized in AS 14.42.295(a)) or alternate state, federal, or other sources. The executive director of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education will administer the program.

*Representative Peggy Wilson  
April 4, 2003*



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## SECTIONAL ANALYSIS – CSHB 211 (HESS)

### ALASKA NURSE RECRUITMENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM

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- Section 1:** Findings and purpose.
- Section 2:** Adds responsibility for establishing standards and eligibility criteria for the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program, including the adoption of necessary regulations and determination of areas of the state and specialties that have a shortage of nurses, to the Alaska Board of Nursing, in consultation with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education.
- Section 3:** Adds responsibility to perform duties relating to the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program to the list of responsibilities of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE).
- Section 4:** Directs the executive director of ACPE to administer the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program.
- Section 5:** Establishes that the money made available to the state from the dividend of the Student Loan Corporation may be appropriated for the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program.
- Section 6:** Establishes the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program.

Sec. 14.43.530 – Establishes the loan repayment program to provide financial incentives for qualified registered nurses to work in the state through the repayment of education loans.

Sec. 14.43.540 – Establishes the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program account in the general fund. The account shall be used to provide financial awards for the repayment of education loans and to pay for the costs of administering the program. The account includes money appropriated by the legislature from the dividend paid to the state by the Alaska Student Loan Corporation or other sources.

Sec. 14.43.550 – Establishes that the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan

Repayment Program shall be administered by the executive director of the ACPE using standards and eligibility criteria established by the Board of Nursing and financial management standards established by the commission. Gives the commission authority to adopt regulations to carry out the duties involved with administering the program, after consultation with the Board of Nursing.

Sec. 14.43.560 – Establishes these eligibility criteria:

- Applicant was hired as a nurse in Alaska on or after July 1, 2003.
- Applicant is employed as a nurse in Alaska during the loan repayment period.
- Applicant is licensed to practice as a nurse in Alaska.
- Applicant must agree to fulfill any requirement of the program.
- Applicant must have outstanding education loans from a recognized lending institution..

Sec. 14.43.570 – Establishes conditions and limitations on loan payments. The total repayment amount to any individual is limited to \$10,000. An annual loan repayment to an individual may be the lesser of \$2,000 or 20 percent of the total loan and interest owed by the person.

Financial awards under the program will be conditioned on the availability of funds. If adequate funds are not available to meet all needs, the executive director of ACPE may prorate available funds and suspend the acceptance of new applications or award funds available for new or pending applicants according to criteria approved by the Board of Nursing.

A loan is not eligible for repayment under the program if it is eligible for repayment or forgiveness under any other program

Sec. 14.43.590 – Definitions of terms.

**Section 7:** Allows the Board of Nursing and ACPE to adopt necessary regulations immediately upon passage of the Act.

**Section 8:** Establishes an immediate effective date for Section 7.

**Section 9:** Establishes an effective date of July 1, 2003, for the remainder of the Act.

23-LS0861D  
Ford  
3/29/03

**CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 211(HES)**

**IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA**

**TWENTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION**

**BY THE HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**Offered:  
Referred:**

**Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVE WILSON**

**A BILL**

**FOR AN ACT ENTITLED**

1 **"An Act relating to a student loan repayment program for nurses, and amending the**  
2 **duties of the Board of Nursing that relate to this program; and providing for an effective**  
3 **date."**

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

5 **\* Section 1.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section  
6 to read:

7 **FINDINGS; PURPOSE.** (a) The legislature finds that a shortage of qualified nurses  
8 exists in this state.

9 (b) The purpose of this Act is to establish the Alaska nurse recruitment loan  
10 repayment program to provide financial incentives through the repayment, in whole or part,  
11 by the state of education loans for nurses upon the nurse's completing a term of employment  
12 as a nurse in the state.

13 **\* Sec. 2.** AS 08.68.100(a) is amended by adding a new paragraph to read:

14 (10) in consultation with the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary

1 Education, establish standards and eligibility criteria for the Alaska nurse recruitment  
2 loan repayment program under AS 14.43.530 - 14.43.590, including the adoption of  
3 necessary regulations and determination of areas of the state that have a shortage of  
4 nurses.

5 \* Sec. 3. AS 14.42.030(b) is amended to read:

6 (b) The commission shall

7 (1) administer the financial aid and interstate education compact  
8 programs under AS 14.43.091 - 14.43.920 and 14.43.990, and AS 14.44;

9 (2) administer the provisions of AS 14.48 concerning regulation of  
10 postsecondary educational institutions;

11 (3) resolve disputes under a consortium or other cooperative agreement  
12 between institutions of public and private higher education in the state; [AND]

13 (4) serve as the state agency required under 20 U.S.C. 1001 - 1155;

14 and

15 (5) perform duties assigned under AS 14.43.530 - 14.43.590

16 (Alaska nurse recruitment loan repayment program).

17 \* Sec. 4. AS 14.42.040 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

18 (c) The executive director of the commission shall administer the Alaska nurse  
19 recruitment loan repayment program under AS 14.43.530 - 14.43.590 in accordance  
20 with standards and eligibility criteria set by the Board of Nursing under AS 08.68.100.

21 \* Sec. 5. AS 14.42.295(a) is amended to read:

22 (a) The board may elect to pay the state a return of contributed capital, or a  
23 dividend, for each base fiscal year that the corporation's net income equals or exceeds  
24 \$2,000,000. The payment may not be less than 10 percent nor more than 35 percent,  
25 as approved by the board, of the corporation's net income for the base fiscal year, and  
26 is subject to the provisions of any applicable bond indentures of the corporation. If a  
27 payment is authorized under this section, payment must be made available by the  
28 corporation before the end of the fiscal year in which payment has been authorized.  
29 The corporation shall notify the commissioner of revenue when the amount of the  
30 payment authorized under this section is available for appropriation. The money  
31 made available under this subsection may be appropriated for the Alaska nurse

1            recruitment loan repayment program under AS 14.43.530 - 14.43.590.

2            \* Sec. 6. AS 14.43 is amended by adding new sections to read:

3                    **Article 9A. Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program.**

4                    **Sec. 14.43.530. Program established.** (a) There is established the Alaska  
5                    nurse recruitment loan repayment program to provide financial incentives for qualified  
6                    nurses to work in this state through the repayment of education loans.

7                    (b) The program is not a financial obligation of the corporation.

8                    **Sec. 14.43.540. Alaska nurse recruitment loan repayment program**  
9                    **account.** (a) The Alaska nurse recruitment loan repayment program account is  
10                    created in the general fund. The account shall be used to provide financial awards for  
11                    the repayment of education loans under the program and to pay for the costs of  
12                    administering the program.

13                    (b) The account includes money that the legislature appropriates from the  
14                    corporation's dividend to the state under AS 14.42.295, the interest and earnings on  
15                    money that are appropriated to the account, and funds contributed from federal or  
16                    other sources. If money available is inadequate to finance the requests from eligible  
17                    nurses under this program for a fiscal year, additional money may be requested from  
18                    the general fund and appropriated to the account for the program.

19                    **Sec. 14.43.550. Administration.** (a) The Alaska nurse recruitment loan  
20                    repayment program shall be administered by the executive director using

21                    (1) the standards and eligibility criteria of the program established by  
22                    the Board of Nursing under AS 08.68.100 and the eligibility criteria established under  
23                    AS 14.43.560; and

24                    (2) the financial management standards for proper administration of  
25                    the Alaska nurse recruitment loan repayment program account as established by the  
26                    commission.

27                    (b) After consultation with the Board of Nursing, the commission may adopt  
28                    regulations to carry out its duties and the executive director's duties under the  
29                    program.

30                    **Sec. 14.43.560. Eligibility criteria.** In addition to program standards and  
31                    eligibility criteria established under AS 08.68.100, an applicant must meet the

1 following criteria:

2 (1) the applicant was hired as a nurse in this state on or after July 1,  
3 2003;

4 (2) the applicant is employed as a nurse in this state during the loan  
5 repayment period;

6 (3) the applicant has the required license to practice as a nurse in this  
7 state;

8 (4) the applicant shall agree to fulfill any requirement of the program;

9 (5) the applicant has outstanding education loans from a lending  
10 institution to be repaid under the program.

11 **Sec. 14.43.570. Conditions and limitations on loan payments.** (a) The total  
12 amount of education loans and interest on loans repaid for an individual may not  
13 exceed \$10,000 in a lifetime for a nurse. An award under this section shall be paid on  
14 an annual basis over a period of at least five years. The maximum annual award under  
15 this section is the lesser of

16 (1) \$2,000; or

17 (2) 20 percent of the total loan and interest amount owed by the  
18 program participant.

19 (b) An award must be conditioned on the availability of money for the  
20 program. The executive director shall monitor the outstanding financial awards made  
21 under the program to ensure the adequacy of the balance of the account to meet  
22 program needs. If the executive director finds that the balance of the account is

23 (1) insufficient to pay for existing awards, the executive director shall  
24 prorate the money available in the account among all existing award recipients and  
25 shall suspend the acceptance of new applications and the processing of pending  
26 applications under the program; and

27 (2) sufficient for existing awards but insufficient for new or pending  
28 applicants, the executive director shall pay existing awards and shall award the money  
29 available for new or pending applicants according to criteria approved by the Board of  
30 Nursing.

31 (c) An educational loan or interest on a loan is not eligible for repayment

1 under the program if the loan or interest is eligible for repayment under another  
2 source, including another loan repayment or forgiveness program.

3 **Sec. 14.43.590. Definitions.** In AS 14.43.530 - 14.43.590, unless the context  
4 otherwise requires,

5 (1) "account" means the Alaska nurse recruitment loan repayment  
6 program account established in AS 14.43.540;

7 (2) "executive director" means the executive director of the  
8 commission;

9 (3) "nurse" means a person licensed as a registered or practical nurse  
10 under AS 08.68.170;

11 (4) "program" means the Alaska nurse recruitment loan repayment  
12 program.

13 \* **Sec. 7.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to  
14 read:

15 **TRANSITION: REGULATIONS.** Notwithstanding sec. 9 of this Act, the state Board  
16 of Nursing and the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education may immediately  
17 proceed to adopt regulations necessary to implement their respective duties under this Act.  
18 The regulations take effect under AS 44.62 (Administrative Procedure Act), but not before  
19 July 1, 2003.

20 \* **Sec. 8.** Section 7 of this Act takes effect immediately under AS 01.10.070(c)

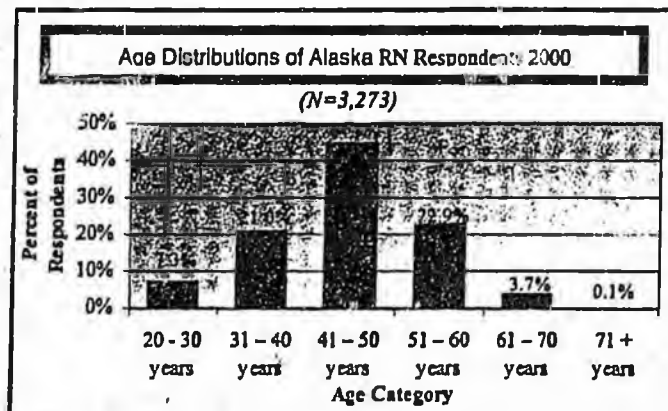
21 \* **Sec. 9.** Except as provided in sec. 8 of this Act, this Act takes effect July 1, 2003.



### Background On the Nursing Shortage in Alaska

There are currently about 5,200 RNs living in Alaska. Since the late 1990's there has been an increasing shortage of Registered Nurses in Alaska and the US as a whole. This has led to an 11.5% vacancy rate for nursing positions in the State. Contributing factors for this shortage include:

- The aging of the workforce. In 2000 the average age of a RN in Alaska 45.1 years compared to 43.3 years nationally. 72% of the RNs in Alaska are over the age of 40 years old. Data from the 2002 license renewal is currently being evaluated, but it is expected that the average age has only increased.<sup>1</sup>



- Hospital and nursing home nursing is very physically demanding. Because of this most nurses working in these settings retire in their 50s. Nationally it is projected that half the nursing workforce will retire in the next five years.
- Fewer young people have gone into the profession. This is graphically illustrated by the above figure.<sup>1</sup> Formerly, the two primary occupations available to women were teaching and nursing. Now there are a larger number of options available. Many women who previously would have become nurses are now becoming doctors.
- Increased complexity of patient care. In order to reduce health care costs more procedures are being done on an outpatient basis, and hospital stays have been shortened. This means that the patients in hospitals are much sicker than 15 years ago, requiring more skilled care.
- In order to reduce costs, hospitals in the 90's increased the number of patients nurses were required to care for at the same time that the patients became sicker. This led many nurses to leave the workforce because of concern about patient and nurse safety.



- A decrease in job satisfaction, as inadequate staffing is preventing RNs from providing high quality care to patients. One of the single most important factors in nurses being satisfied with their working conditions is the RN having ample time to provide quality care to their patients. This is usually directly tied the number and the acuity of the patients they are required to care for.
- Increased work-acquired injury and illness. This is addressed in detail elsewhere, but between the increased number of HIV and hepatitis infected patients and the increased weight of the population, many nurses have suffered career ending injuries or illnesses. It is not unusual for nurses to be asked to care for 300-500 lb patients.

#### **Importance of RNs to Patient Health and Safety**

The nursing shortage effects patient care in two main ways. Studies tie RNs to positive patient outcomes and poor staffing causes experienced RNs to leave the profession due to job dissatisfaction.

- A 2000 study<sup>iii</sup> looked at hospital and Medicare data from hospitals in nine states in five categories of adverse outcomes: length of hospital stay, pneumonia contracted in the hospital, postoperative infection, bed sores, and urinary tract infections contracted while in the hospital. All five measures are markedly decreased with higher levels of RN involvement in patient care.
- A study published in the October 2002 Journal of the American Medical Association<sup>iv</sup>, found the risk of patient mortality increased by 7% for every additional patient in the average nurse's workload in the hospital;
- The study suggests that RNs contribute importantly to surveillance, early detection, and timely interventions that save lives;
- The benefits of improved RN staffing also extend to larger numbers of hospitalized patients who are not at risk for mortality but nevertheless are vulnerable to a wide range of unfavorable outcomes;
- Higher emotional exhaustion and greater job dissatisfaction in nurses were strongly and significantly associated with patient-to-nurse ratios;
- Improving nurse staffing levels may reduce alarming turnover rates in hospitals by reducing burnout and job dissatisfaction, major precursors of job resignation;
- Improving staffing may not only save patient lives and decrease nurse turnover but also reduce hospital costs, if recently published estimates of the costs of replacing a hospital medical and surgical general unit and a specialty nurse (\$42,000 to \$64,000) are correct.



### Health and Safety Issues Related to the Nursing Shortage

Health care is rapidly becoming the most hazardous industry in America, as well as Alaska. RNs report that health and safety concerns play a major role in their decisions to remain in the profession. Nurses and other health care workers are exposed to the following hazards:

- Biological hazards: HIV, hepatitis B and C and more than 20 other infectious agents have caused infections in nurses caring for patients with these infections.
- Ergonomic Injuries – Ergonomics hazards of manual lifting and transfer of patients cause back injuries to over 1/3 of all nurses. Nurses are more prone to back injuries than construction laborer, truck loader, or warehouse worker.<sup>v</sup> Nurses accounted for more than 10% of the total for all occupations combined for neck, back and muscle injuries.<sup>vi</sup>
- Chemical hazards: latex allergy and disinfectants cause occupational asthma, and laser smoke, exposure to carcinogenic chemotherapeutic agents result in illness.

### The Shortage Will Grow

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development<sup>vii</sup> provided the below statistics related to the current and growing nursing shortage.

- Employment demand for RNs is projected to grow nearly 40% between 1998 – 2008, faster than the all-occupational average (16.6%)
- The number of RNs needed to fill the new jobs resulting from industry growth will increase by nearly 1,600.
- If 2008 projections hold true, RNs will be the largest single healthcare occupation and the seventh largest occupation in the state.
- Nursing shortage is nationwide and Alaska must compete for RNs, or grow more of our own, to keep up with demand caused by the aging of society, as well as the aging of the RNs.

### Alaska Nursing Employer Survey Results<sup>viii</sup>

In 2002, the Alaska Colleagues in Caring, in collaboration with the Alaska Hospital and Nursing Home Association, surveyed facilities in Alaska regarding their nursing workforce needs.

- Vacancy rates for RNs increased on average from 5.7% in 2000 to 11.5% in 2002 with the West and North respondents reporting a 20.8% vacancy rate in 2002.



- Rate of Turnover reported for RNs in 2002 was 24% indicating difficulties with retaining RNs
- Employers identified the most successful retention incentives included
  - Decreased workload and greater scheduling choices
  - Educational Options
  - Management education and involvement
  - Positive work environment
- The percentage of facilities that actively recruit RNs from other states increased from 47.6% of facilities in 2000 to 83.3% of facilities in 2002.
- Employers identified the following anticipated changes in demand for nurses in the next two years
  1. Aging population/increased number of nurses retiring
  2. Increase in medical services used and number of patients
  3. Increased need for nurses, especially RNs
  4. Possible closure of facilities
  5. New facilities built/facility expansion
  6. An increased difficulty in recruiting and retaining nurses

### **Current Nursing Education in Alaska**

The University of Alaska is the primary educator of nurses in the state. Weber State has had a small LPN program in the state for many years, but they will soon be leaving the state. Nursing education is very expensive to provide due to the cost of labs and clinical rotations. This cost is why there are not more providers of nursing education, and why nationally there has been a decrease in nursing education programs.

### **Current RN Programs Provided by UAA (110 RN graduates per year)**

- 2 year RN – Anchorage 32 students admitted per year; Fairbanks 16 students, Kodiak 9 students (every 2 years)
- 4 year RN – Anchorage 80 students admitted per year, with an additional 40 being added this summer
- 1 year LPN – Anchorage 16 students admitted per year, Bethel 7, Fairbanks 8 (rotates), Ketchikan 6 (rotates)

### **Projected Locations and Numbers of Nursing Students 2006 (220 RN graduates per year)**

- 2 year RN – Anchorage 32 students admitted per year, Fairbanks 16, and about 40 students admitted per year in Juneau, Bethel, Kodiak, Kenai, Ketchikan, or Sitka on a rotating basis. Other sites are also being investigated.
- 4 year RN – Anchorage 120 students admitted per year.



### **Articulation Programs**

The University already has an RN to BSN program in place that can be completed through distance learning. UAA is in the process of refining the LPN to RN program to make mobility within the profession easier.

### **Current Demand for Nursing Education Exceeds Slots**

The UAA four-year BSN program has only a minimal waiting list, which should be eliminated with this year's planned expansion. This year the 2-year (AAS) RN program had 2 applicants for every position. Initial interest meetings in expansion sites such as Kenai have shown a tremendous interest from persons in the community.



## SOLUTIONS

The Alaska Nurses Association suggests the following solutions to the Alaska nursing shortage, which come under three main categories:

- Recruitment and education of new RNs
- Retention of experienced RNs
- Adapting the work environment to prolong the careers of aging RNs

### RECRUITMENT AND EDUCATION

- State funding support of UAA and Industry Consortium's effort to double the number of RN graduates by 2006. This requires the State to match the industries commitment of 2.4 million over the next three years.
- Continue Federal funding of the Recruitment and Retention of Alaska Natives into Nursing (RRANN Program) at UAA.
- Support legislation for tuition loan reimbursement of nurses who work in Alaska. Currently several legislators are working to draft such legislation.
- Support an increase to competitive salaries for nursing professors. RNs can currently make more practicing in a hospital than teaching at the University, making the recruitment of qualified instructors very difficult.
- The Alaska Nurses Association is working to develop a recruitment program aimed at grade school children to show them the variety of careers available in the nursing profession.
- The Alaska Nurses Association, hopefully with the support of the Alaska Department of Labor and the University, is planning to work with high schools in developing a pre-nursing preparation program to ensure a successful foundation is created in math and science, especially for rural and non-traditional students.
- With the help of industry, identify and develop training for post-graduate RNs in high-need specialty areas, such as OR and ICU.
- Encourage employers to provide financial incentives for nurses working in facilities to mentor nursing students and new graduates.



## **RETENTION OF EXPERIENCED RNS**

### **Workplace Conditions**

- Support creation and adoption of legislation and/or standards for an appropriate nurse to patient acuity system that creates a safe and satisfying work environment. Several states have passed or are considering similar legislation.
- Create financial incentives for facilities to apply for Nursing Magnet Status with American Nurses Credentialing Center. Magnet status ensures RN participation in workplace design, and promotes quality patient care, highly increasing job satisfaction.
- Encourage employers to make nursing attractive as a long-term career by increasing retirement and medical benefits.
- Encourage Employers to be responsive to RN needs, such as providing daycare that is available during the hours that nurses work and providing flexible scheduling options.
- Create legislation to prohibit mandatory overtime as a staffing solution to the nursing shortage. Other states have successfully passed such legislation.

### **Health and Safety Solutions**

- Provide legislative or administrative incentives for facilities to purchasing latex free products in order to limit latex injuries to RNs and patients, as well as decrease related costs.
- Support the revision and passage of Alaska's existing Needlestick Legislation<sup>ix</sup> to meet federal standards, to protect patients and healthcare workers from HIV, Hepatitis, and other infectious diseases.
- Department of Labor's development of Regulations aimed at reducing injuries, and related costs, acquired from lifting and transferring patients in facilities, such as lift teams and assistive devices. Alaska Native Medical Center has had significant success in this area.

## **ADAPTING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT TO PROLONG THE CAREERS OF AGING RNS**

- Encourage institutions to be flexible about working hours and patient loads to allow aging nurses to physically prolong their careers. Many facilities demand 12-hour shifts, which are physically demanding and difficult for aging RNs.
- Fund a study to explore what measures need to be adopted to keep RNs who are over 50 in the workforce.



- Find creative ways to utilize experienced nurses to educate, mentor and recruit new nurses into the profession.

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<sup>i</sup> "Alaska Colleagues in Caring, Alaska Re-Licensure Survey for RNs, 1996, 1998, and 2000", October 2001

<sup>ii</sup> Id.

<sup>iii</sup> ANA's Nurse Staffing and Patient Outcomes in the Inpatient Hospital Setting released in May of 2000.

<sup>iv</sup> "Hospital Nurse Staffing and Patient Mortality, Nurse Burnout, and Job Dissatisfaction," by Linda Aiken, PhD. RN, et. al., is in the October 23/30, 2002, issue of JAMA. The study looked at 232,342 patients between the ages of 20 and 85 who underwent general surgical, orthopedic, or vascular procedures in 168 Pennsylvania hospitals from April 1, 1998 to November 30, 1999.

<sup>v</sup> Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1998.

<sup>vi</sup> Id.

<sup>vii</sup> Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section (April 9, 2002)

<sup>viii</sup> Alaska Colleagues in Caring Nursing Employer Survey, 1998, 200, & 2002.

<sup>ix</sup> Sec. 18.60.880. Needlestick and sharps injury protections for health care workers.



APR - 4 2003

April 2, 2003

Honorable Peggy Wilson  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Wilson;

On behalf of Alaska's 6,000 RNs I would like to thank you for taking the leadership in drafting HB 211, "An Act relating relating to a student loan repayment program for nurses."

Alaska is already facing a nursing shortage with health care facilities reporting average vacancy rates of 11%, with some rural facilities reporting vacancies as high as 35%. This shortage is only going to get worse over the next five years since the average age of nurses in the state is 47, and many hospital nurses retire in their mid-fifties.

The nursing shortage is contributing to the rise in health care costs because it is forcing health care institutions to staff with traveling and agency nurses who are more expensive to institutions than their regular staff. It is also leading to an increase in overtime, which is expensive to institutions and has been shown to contribute to nursing errors and injury.

The University of Alaska is responding to this shortage by doubling the number of nursing students they teach each year by the year 2006. SB 154 is an excellent companion to this effort by the University. It will provide an incentive for Alaskans to enter the profession, and remain in the state to practice.

With the armed conflict in the middle east, the threat of bioterrorism, and the emergence of fatal illnesses such as West Nile virus and SARS, now more than ever we need to take action to insure we have an adequate number of nurses to serve Alaskans in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Patricia K. Senner, MS, RN, ANP  
President

**Subject: SB 154 & HB 211**

**Date: Sun, 30 Mar 2003 00:15:20 -0900**

**From: Karen Decker-Brown RN <karenrn@alaska.net>**

**To: representative\_peggy\_wilson@legis.state.ak.us**

MAR 31 2003

Dear Peggy Wilson:

What a great bill! It was needed five to ten years ago. I have been a nurse for over 20 years, born here and love being a nurse. I am currently finishing up graduate school, (MSN) and have incurred about 30-40 K costs for grad school between courses, books, travel, mailings misc. and so forth. It will take years of employment for me to be on the plus side of the equation when other day to day living expenses are factored. My husband and I took out a home equity loan to pay for school. I should be graduating this summer. Unfortunately, UAA would not admit me to their program although every other grad nursing program I applied to in the lower 48 accepted me. This forced me to incur additional expenses for travel that I would not have otherwise have. I attribute this to prejudice and that they get more money from out of state stincur. But that is old history. I am excited about this as my daughter who was born here has alprejudice for nursing school, although obviously not in the State of Alaska. I have been encouraging young people to go into the profession as it has been good for me and I would like to see other native students go this route. Karen Decker-Brown RN FNPS.