

Advocacy in Action: Nurses Rally on Capitol Hill to Advance Health Policy

Margaret Farrell Daingerfield, EdD, RN, CNE, NJSNA President



Mission: The mission of the New Jersey State Nurses Association is to promote the profession of nursing, advance the practice of nursing, and advocate for nurses.

Vision: Creating the future through advocacy, leadership, and public policy. On June 26, 2025, more than 30 nurses from New Jersey joined the 500 nurses, nursing students, and nurse leaders from across the country that converged on Capitol Hill for the American Nurses Association's (ANA) annual Hill Day. This high-impact advocacy event is a keystone of the ANA's legislative efforts, providing a powerful platform for nurses to directly engage with policymakers and champion the issues most critical to our profession and the patients we serve.

The participants, representing 47 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, brought their collective voice to Congress to advocate for a healthcare policy agenda covering four strategic priorities.

1. Preserving Funding for Medicaid:

At the time nurses were on the Hill, Congress was threatening to reduce Medicaid funding. Nurses argued the proposed federal budget cuts being considered would have a devastating effect on both the nursing workforce and the patients served. Nurses focused on educating representatives on the real-world consequences of such actions, highlighting how cuts could lead to the elimination of services, hiring freezes and layoffs for nurses and other healthcare personnel, increasing workload and accelerating burnout. Funding cuts would jeopardize healthcare access for millions of Americans, particularly in rural and underserved

communities, leading to patients forgoing or delaying necessary care, resulting in more severe health conditions, and higher healthcare system costs.

Update: Despite the actions of ANA members across the country, the *One Big Beautiful Bill* passed resulting in sweeping cuts in Medicaid funding. These cuts are projected to lead to millions of people losing their health insurance coverage, with particular concern for vulnerable populations such as young adults, people with disabilities, and children.

2. Supporting the Nursing Workforce:

Nurses advocated for the reauthorization with increased funding for the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs. These crucial programs provide financial support for nursing education and faculty development, helping to recruit and train the next generation of nurses. The request also included support for at least \$210 million in funding for the National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR).

Update: In August, the Senate Appropriations Committee preserved level funding for Title VIII and the NINR. The exception was a \$2 million reduction in the Nursing Workforce Diversity Program. Later, in September, the House Appropriations Committee voted to cut Title VIII programs. This action included the elimination of the Nurse Faculty Loan Program. ANA's Government Affairs Team continues to advocate, explaining that this is not the last step in the process and planning to do everything in their power to make sure these programs are not defunded.

3. Removing Practice Barriers for APRNs:

A significant focus of the meetings was the Improving Care and Access to Nurses (ICAN) Act which would remove outdated and arbitrary barriers that prevent Advanced Practice Registered Nurses from practicing to the full extent of their education and clinical training. Nurses shared personal stories with their representatives, explaining how these restrictions (ordering diabetic shoes, nutrition therapy, hospice care, cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation, as examples) particularly within Medicare and Medicaid, create delays in care and limit patient access, especially in areas with a shortage of physicians.

4. Protect Nurses from Preventable

Workplace Violence: One in four nurses report being assaulted and nurses are more likely to be exposed to workplace violence than police or prison guards. Nurses deserve a workplace environment that prioritizes their safety. This legislation would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to establish an enforceable federal standard for violence prevention in healthcare settings.

The Power of Nurses

Throughout the day, participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences to connect with legislators on a deeper level demonstrating the power of nurses' personal stories. These advocacy efforts were reinforced by a symbolic act: nurses left stethoscopes behind for lawmakers as a tangible reminder of the power of nurses, the nation's most trusted professionals and the heartbeat of healthcare. ■