

ACT 212

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H.B. NO. 2330

A Bill for an Act Relating to Nursing.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. There is growing evidence that the supply of licensed nurses working in the State does not meet the present demand. As of February 1987 there

were over five hundred vacancies in health care agencies throughout the State, and it had been estimated that the number of vacancies would increase to eight hundred by 1988 and nine hundred in 1989.

Serious implications arise due to the shortage of nurses in the State. Insufficient staffing together with increased patient acuity and occupancy has a detrimental effect on the quality of nursing care. Long working hours for existing nurses affect their stamina and performance. One major hospital in Hawaii has had to close a substantial number of its surgical beds due in part to a lack of nursing staff. It is expected that other hospitals will face similar closures if the nursing shortage is not corrected. To compensate for the shortage, hospitals have found it necessary to ask nurses to work overtime and to recruit short-term contract nurses from the mainland. Such actions translate to increased medical care costs but with a detrimental effect in the quality of care for the people of Hawaii. All indications are that this shortage will continue in virtually all medical care areas where nurses are needed.

Hawaii's rapidly growing population requires that something be done to alleviate Hawaii's growing nursing shortage. By 1990, the department of business and economic development projects that the resident population in our State will increase to 1,138,400 with another eleven per cent increase to 1,267,800 by the year 2000. The elderly population is also showing a significant growth. This group is known to utilize the health care system more than any other age group. The United States Bureau of Census predicts that the number of frail and elderly eighty-five years and older will grow from 2.7 million in 1985 to 4.9 million in the year 2000. By then, fifty per cent of direct care in-hospital facilities will be devoted to caring for the elderly. In Hawaii, a projected total of 168,900 individuals will be sixty years and older by the year 1990. In fact, the people of the State are known to have the longest life expectancy in the country.

Recognizing this pressing nursing shortage, the legislature finds that there is a need for a program which would immediately increase the number of licensed nurses in the State. There are many graduate nurses in Hawaii working as licensed practical nurses, nurses aids, ward clerks, doctor's secretaries, and other similar nursing related work, who have not yet passed the written examination required for the commission on graduates of foreign nursing schools, or the written examination required by the state board of nursing, or both. The time demands of their occupation and other socioeconomic pressures prevent them from otherwise being able to prepare adequately for the licensing examinations. With some concerted assistance from the private sector and the State, these graduate nurses may be able to pass the written examinations and become licensed nurses. Certain hospitals in the State have indicated a willingness to assist and accommodate their qualified employees by maintaining their employment status and salary while participating in a program operated by the State to improve test taking skills and to prepare them for the nursing license examinations. These hospitals, along with state government-operated hospitals, could serve as valuable resources in the planning and development of a nursing license preparation program by the State.

The legislature therefore finds that it is desirable to establish and to test the effectiveness of a program designed to improve test taking skills of graduate nurses to enable them successfully to pass the required written examinations. Review and training courses are to be held for four to six months and shall commence four to six months prior to the dates that the nursing license examinations are to be offered.

The purpose of this Act is to provide for such a pilot program to be operated by the department of health, which shall include the provision of classroom facilities, books and review material, instructors, and such other equipment and personnel

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necessary and accessory for the program. The effect of this program will be to offer an expeditious solution to Hawaii's nursing shortage.

SECTION 2. Nursing license examination preparation program established. There is established within the department of health a pilot program to be called "Operation Nightingale". The department of health shall design, with the assistance of the University of Hawaii, a review and training course to enable graduates of nursing schools to pass the written examination required for the commission on graduates of foreign nursing schools, or the written examination required by the state board of nursing, or both. Classes may be conducted on a full time basis during daytime hours on weekdays at Leahi Hospital or at such other site as the department of health may deem appropriate.

Additionally, the department of health shall establish requirements and procedures for the selection of candidates for the pilot program. Candidate selection shall be made through a committee comprised of the director of health or a designated representative, the president of the University of Hawaii or a designated representative, a representative of the Hawaii nurses association, and a representative selected by the director of health from each of the hospitals within the State.

SECTION 3. Duration of program; reporting requirement. The nursing license examination preparation pilot program shall operate for two years. The department of health shall submit to the legislature not later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 1989 a report of the performance of the pilot program and any other matter which may be relevant.

SECTION 4. Appropriation. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 1988-1989 for the nursing license examination program. The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of health for the purpose of this Act.

SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 1988.

(Approved June 7, 1988.)