



PREPARED REMARKS: Sanders Statement on the Nursing Workforce Crisis

“We Can and Must Solve the Nursing Crisis in Vermont”

Burlington, Vt., Jan. 3 – Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), joined by Governor Phil Scott, Senate President Pro Tempore Becca Balint, and House Speaker Jill Krowinski, Monday delivered remarks on Vermont’s nursing workforce crisis at the Vermont State House.

Sen. Sanders’ remarks, as prepared for delivery, are below:

“Let me begin by thanking the nurses of Vermont, and all of our health care providers, for the extraordinary work they are performing during this terrible pandemic. In this unprecedented public health crisis, they are true heroines and heroes and are saving lives every day.

“Like almost every state in this country Vermont has faced a nursing shortage for many, many years. That shortage has been significantly exacerbated by the pandemic, and we now face a crisis situation. The simple truth is that patients are not getting the quality care they need because there are not enough nurses to provide that care. That is true in hospitals, nursing homes and almost all types of health care facilities.

“Today, we have about 15,000 nurses in Vermont. The reality is that we will need to put into our workforce some 9000 additional nurses in the next five years if we are going to fill the shortages we currently have, in addition to replacing those nurses who retire from the profession or leave for whatever reason. If we are going to provide the high-quality health care we need in Vermont our goal should be to have about 25,000 nurses, at all levels, by the year 2027.

“There are a number of reasons as to why we have a nursing shortage today.

“First, we do not have enough educators in our nursing schools. The very good news is that young people want to become nurses and virtually every nursing school in the state of Vermont receives more applicants than they can accommodate. The bad news is that despite a massive shortage of nurses, our nursing schools are turning away people who wish to enter the profession because we lack the faculty numbers to educate them. That is pretty crazy.

“Today, at our five nursing schools - UVM, Castleton, Vermont Technical College, Norwich and Northern Vermont University - we have approximately 75 full-time teaching faculty. To graduate the number of nursing students we will need in the coming years, that nurse educator faculty is going to have to expand to at least 125 full-time nurse educators.

“The main reason we lack nurse educators, who often have to have a graduate degree, is for a very simple reason. We pay them abysmally. Today, the average salary in Vermont for a nurse educator is about \$65,000 - significantly less than what that person could earn in the clinical field. In other words, to become a nurse educator today is to make a significant financial sacrifice. The salaries for nurse educators must be significantly increased.

“And what is even crazier is that, in the midst of all this, the Vermont health care system is now spending some \$75 million a year on traveling nurses. These are often out of state nurses who will work, under contract, at a medical facility for a short period of time. These traveling nurses receive salaries that are many times higher than our local permanent nurses receive. In other words, instead of spending money to educate nurses who will be part of a long-term sustainable workforce, we are spending huge sums of money on people who come into the state and then leave.

“Second, the problem is not just a shortage of nurse educators. It is also a failure to provide an adequate number of hands-on training positions in medical facilities around the state. It takes significant clinical staff time to adequately train a nursing student outside of the classroom, and these preceptors today are not fairly compensated for their services. If there are not enough training slots for nurses available in medical settings, we will not have enough nurses. That's an issue that also must be addressed.

“Third, as an immediate step forward we must create scholarships and loan repayment programs and other forms of incentives for Vermonters and out-of-state individuals who agree to live and work in Vermont for no less than five years in qualifying nursing professions.

“Nurses are the backbone of our health care system in Vermont and across the country. Simply stated, we will not have the quality health care we need unless we have an adequate number of nurses who are well trained and well compensated. I have absolute confidence that this is a problem that can be solved.

“I look forward to working with the governor, the legislature and the congressional delegation to make certain that we do that.”

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