SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The United States Department of Education has proposed to exclude graduate degrees in nursing, social work, counseling, therapy, education, and allied health professions from the definition of "professional degrees" for federal student loan purposes under regulations implementing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025; and

WHEREAS, This proposed federal reclassification would reduce federal student loan limits for students pursuing Master of Social Work (MSW), Doctor of Social Work (DSW), Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), master's degrees in counseling and therapy, Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), master's and doctoral degrees in occupational therapy, master's degrees in speech-language pathology, Doctor of Audiology (AuD), Master of Physician Assistant Studies, Master of Public Health (MPH), Doctor of Public Health (DrPH), master's degrees in education, and other essential health and human services credentials; and

WHEREAS, The proposed reclassification would reduce annual federal student loan limits and lifetime limits for students in these programs; and

WHEREAS, This reduction may not cover the full cost of

graduate education for many students pursuing careers in health and human services, potentially forcing them to rely on higher-cost private loans or forgo graduate education entirely; and

WHEREAS, Illinois is home to tens of thousands of licensed professionals in nursing, social work, counseling, therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, audiology, public health, physician assistant practice, and education who hold or require these graduate credentials; and

WHEREAS, The State of Illinois requires professional licensure for these practitioners, including Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW), Licensed Social Workers (LSW), Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN), Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors (LCPC), Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT), Physical Therapists (PT), Occupational Therapists (OT), Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP), Audiologists, Physician Assistants (PA), and Professional Educator Licenses (PEL); and

WHEREAS, These professions require rigorous academic preparation, including advanced graduate education, supervised clinical practice, comprehensive examinations, and ongoing

continuing education to maintain licensure; and

WHEREAS, Illinois law recognizes these practitioners as professionals under the Illinois Compiled Statutes, including the Clinical Social Work and Social Work Practice Act (225 ILCS 20/), the Nurse Practice Act (225 ILCS 65/), the Professional Counselor and Clinical Professional Counselor Licensing and Practice Act (225 ILCS 107/), the Illinois Marriage and Family Therapy Licensing Act (225 ILCS 55/), the Illinois Physical Therapy Act (225 ILCS 90/), the Illinois Occupational Therapy Practice Act (225 ILCS 75/), and other professional licensing statutes; and

WHEREAS, These professionals provide essential services to Illinois residents, including mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, child welfare services, medical social work, acute and primary healthcare, rehabilitation therapy, speech and language services, public health interventions, and educational support; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects approximately 74,000 openings for social workers annually over the next decade nationwide, highlighting critical workforce shortages, with similar shortages documented across counseling, therapy, and allied health professions; and

WHEREAS, According to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Health Resources and Services Administration, the United States currently faces a shortage of approximately 295,800 registered nurses as of 2025, with projections indicating continued deficits through 2037; and

WHEREAS, The proposed federal reclassification will disproportionately impact women, who comprise between 75-85% of students and practitioners in these fields, and will create barriers for first-generation college students, low-income students, and students from underrepresented communities who rely on federal student loans to finance graduate education; and

WHEREAS, Communities throughout Illinois, particularly rural areas, low-income neighborhoods, and underserved urban communities, depend on these professionals for access to healthcare, mental health services, child welfare, education, and social support; and

WHEREAS, The economic contributions of these professions to Illinois are substantial, with licensed professionals in nursing, social work, counseling, therapy, and allied health fields generating billions of dollars in economic activity annually while serving vulnerable populations and preventing

more costly interventions; and

WHEREAS, The proposed federal reclassification contradicts Illinois' longstanding recognition of these practitioners as licensed professionals who meet rigorous educational, clinical, and ethical standards; and

WHEREAS, The State of Illinois has a compelling interest in ensuring adequate access to affordable graduate education for health and human services professionals in order to meet the healthcare, mental health, child welfare, educational, and social service needs of Illinois residents; and

WHEREAS, Illinois must take proactive steps to protect its health and human services workforce from federal policies that threaten to reduce access to these essential professions; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING HEREIN, that we believe that nursing, social work, professional counseling, marriage and family therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, audiology, physician assistant practice, public health, and education are professional disciplines that require advanced graduate education,

professional licensure, and adherence to rigorous ethical and clinical standards; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we believe the following graduate degrees are professional degrees requiring advanced professional education and leading to professional licensure:

(a) Social Work: Master of Social Work (MSW), Doctor of Social Work (DSW), Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work (PhD);

(b) Nursing: Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) specialty degrees;

(c) Counseling and Therapy: master's degrees in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, master's degrees in Counseling Psychology, master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling, master's degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy, other counseling degrees leading to Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC), or Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) licensure;

(d) Physical Therapy: Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT);

(e) Occupational Therapy: Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT), Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD);

(f) Speech-Language Pathology: Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology (MS-SLP), Master of Arts in

Speech-Language Pathology (MA-SLP);

(g) Audiology: Doctor of Audiology (AuD);

(h) Physician Assistant: Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS), Master of Medical Science - Physician Assistant (MMS-PA);

(i) Public Health: Master of Public Health (MPH), Doctor of Public Health (DrPH); and

(j) Education: master's degrees in Education, master's degrees in Teaching, master's degrees in School Social Work, master's degrees in School Counseling, master's degrees in Educational Leadership, other graduate education degrees leading to Professional Educator License (PEL) endorsements; and be it further

RESOLVED, That any state agency, public university, or entity receiving state funds should take all necessary steps to avoid discrimination against individuals holding these graduate degrees in hiring, promotion, compensation, professional development funding, or other terms and conditions of employment based on any federal student loan classification; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge the United States Department of Education to include all graduate degrees in nursing, social work, counseling, therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, audiology, physician

assistant practice, public health, and education in its definition of "professional degrees" for federal student loan purposes; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge the Illinois Congressional Delegation to advocate for legislation to ensure that graduate students in all health and human services professions have access to adequate federal student loan funding to complete their professional education; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we commit to exploring state-level solutions to support graduate education in health and human services professions, including but not limited to scholarships, grants, loan repayment assistance programs, and other workforce development initiatives; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we express our support for the licensed health and human services professionals in Illinois who serve our most vulnerable populations with skill, compassion, and unwavering commitment to the public good; and be it further

RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be delivered to Governor JB Pritzker, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, the American Nurses Association - Illinois, the Illinois Nurses Association, the National

Association of Social Workers - Illinois Chapter, and the Illinois Federation of Teachers.