

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

The National Nurse Act of 2017

Creating a Visible National Nurse Leader for the Benefit of Our Nation's Health

At the beginning of the 115th Congress, Reps. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and Peter King (R-NY) will reintroduce the National Nurse Act to spring preventive health forward by designating the Chief Nurse Officer, an existing position in the U.S. Public Health Service, as the National Nurse for Public Health. This position would provide a publicly visible nurse leader who would collaborate with health care leaders to address health disparities and set goals of better public health.

Conditions such as heart disease, cancer, obesity, and opioid addiction pose the single greatest threat to the health of Americans and our nation's economy. Nurses provide key services for the prevention and management of these conditions and this legislation is necessary to support further work needed to promote prevention, improve outcomes, and guide national, state and local efforts in addressing the nation's health. Nurses represent the largest single component of the health care profession with approximately 3,600,000 registered nurses and each and every one of them is poised to lead this national movement towards improved public health. The National Nurse for Public Health would provide the uniting voice and leadership to do so.

The National Nurse Act provides an opportunity to (a) bring forth the significant and trusted voice of the nurse to the ongoing conversation about health and health care in America; (b) in effect, deliver a unified, prominent message of preventive health at a time when millions of Americans, including millions of children, live without health insurance or access to regular primary care; (c) be an authoritative visible presence to advocate for public health issues; (d) set a new standard for a more accurate and realistic recognition of nursing's importance to health and health care in the United States; and (e) engage and inspire increased participation of nurses and other health professionals (including students and retirees) in prevention to include replicating successful health promotion activities in their own local communities. Please read more about the legislation in the section-by-section summary and an outline of revisions made to the legislation between the 114th Congress and the 115th Congress below.

Section-by-Section Summary

1. Section 1 – Short Title: This Act may be cited as the “National Nurse Act of 2017”
2. Section 2 (a) – Establishing and Designating a National Nurse for Public Health
 - This section establishes that the individual who is currently designated as the Chief Nurse Officer within the United States Public Health Service will also be known as the National Nurse for Public Health. This is comparable to the President of the United States also being referred to as the Commander in Chief. The National Nurse for Public Health would continue to serve within the Office of the Surgeon General.

3. Section 2 (b) – National Nurse for Public Health Duties and Responsibilities

- While the Chief Nurse Officer currently provides invaluable work within the U.S. Public Health Service, the National Nurse for Public Health designation would specifically enhance this position's leadership role among nursing professionals nationwide. More specifically, the National Nurse for Public Health would:
 - Represent the United States at the Global Forum for Government Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers and serve as a member of the Federal Nursing Service Council. The National Nurse for Public Health, as those designated national nurse leaders in other nations, would be the chief representative for the United States Government for international health issues reviewed by nurses.
 - Represent the Office of the Surgeon General and the entire U.S. Public Health Service in conversations with groups concerned with nursing issues. The National Nurse would provide a link between local, state, national, and international communications in order to best provide leadership for nurses nationwide.
 - Provide intelligence learned from regular communications with the above nursing groups to the Surgeon General and the Nurse Professional Advisory Committee.
 - Promote public health by encouraging fellow health professionals to educate and develop outreach to members of the public.
 - Encourage continuing education for existing nurses and the continued preparation of future nurses.
 - Promote public safety and emergency preparedness for nurses and the general public.
 - Prepare and publish a biennial report to Congress outlining the state of the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service Nurse Category.

4. Section 2 (c) – National Health Promotion Role

- The National Nurse for Public Health, along with the Surgeon General and other Public Health Service officials, will help to identify national health priorities. A major role will be to also encourage community-based projects that address the national health priorities and advocate successful evidence based projects to be replicated around the country. The National Nurse for Public Health will encourage and monitor health promotion activities to determine if national prevention goals are being met.
- The National Nurse for Public Health will engage in many forms of communication in order to address and disseminate information about national health priorities.
- One of the core responsibilities of the National Nurse for Public Health is to ensure that health promotion information is developed and disseminated widely.

Revisions to National Nurse Act of 2017 from National Nurse Act of 2015

The following revisions were made to the National Nurse Act of 2017 at the request of many leaders from within the nursing community. These modifications do not change the premise of the National Nurse Act of 2015. These minor revisions were made to address redundancy in the bill and in existing statute.

1. Section 1711 (a) (2) of H.R. 379, the National Nurse Act of 2015 designates specific administrative issuances by a specific date. In the past, a process that has been flexible would be frozen in statute and unchangeable except by Congressional action. Therefore, this section was removed because of the aforementioned and because the paragraph prior (Section 1711 (a) (1)) suffices to establish the new title of National Nurse for Public Health for the individual serving as Chief Nurse Officer of the Public Health Service.
2. Section 1711 (b) of H.R. 379, the National Nurse Act of 2015 specifies that the National Nurse will be of an equivalent rank to an Army/Air Force position and a Navy position. Under current law, the Chief Nurse Officer position is either at the O-7 or O-8 grade at the Secretary's discretion. The provision as written in H.R. 379 would compel a higher grade and therefore a higher compensation for the position, generating a fiscal impact on the Department. This section was removed because it is not necessary for the position to be an O-8 grade and to avoid a fiscal impact.
3. Section 1711 (d) (3) (C) of H.R. 379, the National Nurse Act of 2015 specifies that the position of National Nurse for Public Health will participate in preparing the annual status report. Statute requires an annual report, but only through January 1, 2015, therefore there is no required report under statute and this language is not necessary.