

October 20, 2025

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) writes to express deep concern over the recent cuts to essential components of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that directly sustain America's rural health infrastructure. These reductions, affecting core Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) programs, especially the Division of Nursing and Public Health within the Bureau of Health Workforce, pose significant risks to already fragile rural health systems.

NRHA is a non-profit membership organization with more than 21,000 members nationwide that provides leadership on rural health issues. Our membership includes nearly every component of rural America's health care, including rural community hospitals, critical access hospitals (CAHs), doctors, nurses, and patients. We provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research.

The loss of staff within HRSA's Division of Nursing and Public Health represents a significant setback to federal workforce development for rural communities. This division has long served as the backbone of federal nursing policy, overseeing the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs that educate, recruit, and retain nurses across the nation. These programs support nursing schools, rural hospitals, and community health centers, among others, ensuring a pipeline of highly qualified nurses prepared to meet the unique challenges of rural areas.

Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of this loss. Nearly one in four registered nurses work in a rural area, and many of rural facilities already face severe shortages.¹ According to HRSA data, more than 65% of all rural counties currently lack adequate primary care professionals, including nursing staff, a deficit that directly limits access to primary care, emergency services, and maternal health.² Without a dedicated division to coordinate and fund these efforts, federal nursing policy risks becoming fragmented and unresponsive to the needs of rural America.

The Division of Nursing and Public Health plays an essential role in maintaining quality, safety, and preparedness in rural hospitals, many of which operate with minimal clinical staff and limited surge capacity. Elimination of nursing program staff will hinder the federal government's ability to:

- Monitor and respond to rural workforce shortages in real time
- Oversee initiatives addressing nurse burnout, behavioral health, and workforce resiliency
- Support training programs that prepare nurses for roles in critical access hospital, rural primary care, and emergency care roles and
- Advance nursing leadership in rural health systems through grants, research, and technical assistance.

¹ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/25982/chapter/5#69>

² <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/health-care-workforce#:~:text=to%20determine%20HPSAs,-Where%20are%20HPSAs%20located%20in%20rural%20areas?,Health%20Professional%20Shortage%20Areas%20Statistics>.

These losses at HRSA's Bureau of Health Workforce compound previous eliminations that have already impacted rural health services and public health infrastructures. Should these cuts stand, the effects will extend far beyond nursing training, to longer emergency response times, loss of essential services in rural hospitals, and higher patient morbidity and mortality in rural regions. In addition to nursing programs, terminations related to the government shut down occurred for oral health, maternal and child, substance use, mental health, and key public health programs serving rural communities. Federal health agencies must have the necessary staff and resources to carry out the public health, research, quality, and operational work that rural Americans rely on for their health, safety, and well-being.

NRHA urges HHS to take immediate steps to:

- Restore federal nursing workforce capacity by reinstating all three of the branches within the HRSA Division of Nursing and Public Health.
- Safeguard funding for Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development and ensure that these grants continue uninterrupted, particularly for rural-serving institutions.
- Engage directly with rural stakeholders and NRHA members to assess the full scope of these cuts and identify mechanisms for mitigating harm to rural hospitals and clinics.

Rural communities cannot absorb further health professional workforce losses. The Division of Nursing and Public Health dissolution undermines decades of investment in workforce stability, jeopardizing not only nursing education and practice but also the broader health and safety of rural America.

We respectfully urge your office to reconsider these actions. NRHA stands ready to work with the Trump Administration to protect the essential programs that make rural care possible. Please contact NRHA's Government Affairs and Policy Director Alexa McKinley Abel (amckinley@ruralhealth.us) for additional information.

Sincerely,



Alan Morgan
Chief Executive Officer
National Rural Health Association

CC:

Russell Vought, Director, Office of Management and Budget
Tom Engels, Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration