Chair Hansen and Members of the Committee:

Washington is facing an increasing need and a simultaneous shortage of health care providers. Across the country and in our state, it has become evident that the shortage of nurses, in particular, is exacerbated by the shortage of master’s and doctorally-prepared nurse educators to teach, train and produce quality nurses to meet the state’s growing healthcare needs. This Pay It Forward program was designed specifically to address the shortage of highly-qualified nurse educators to relieve the current bottle neck in the nursing education system.

More and more, nursing programs seek doctorally-prepared faculty members. While most programs require tenure-track faculty members to at least have a master’s degree (and many prefer or even require a doctoral degree), many of those positions are going unfilled for lack of qualified applicants, and are instead temporarily filled by part-time instructors who are less qualified to teach at a high level. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the two main reasons for the inability to recruit full-time faculty are: 1) a limited pool of doctorally prepared faculty; and 2) noncompetitive salaries. This pilot program will address both of those barriers.

HB 1344 will help increase the number of doctorally and master’s prepared nurses. High tuition is a major barrier to advanced degree attainment, and Pay It Forward will remove it. Instead of paying upfront tuition, participants can finance their degree through fixed, income-based contributions for a set number of years after graduation. The Pay It Forward program is also flexible enough to allow nurses to continue working and supporting their families while they obtain their Master’s or doctoral degree. Because contributions are completely based on income, nurses who want to pursue careers in teaching can do so. Instead of feeling pressured to accept higher-paying jobs as clinicians in order to pay off high-interest student loans, they can choose a career in teaching through Pay It Forward, which tailors their contributions to their individual income level.

Beyond each nursing program’s job description, there is no certificate or degree required to be a nurse educator. There are various degrees and pathways nurses can take to become a nurse educator. However, a number of nursing programs in the state have adopted curriculum, certificates, or tracks geared specifically toward nurses planning to become nurse educators. Those include:

- University of Washington, Tacoma, Master of Nursing
- Washington State University, Spokane, Tri-Cities, Vancouver, Walla Walla, and Yakima, Master of Nursing
• Washington State University, Post-Master’s Certificate
• University of Washington, Tacoma, Doctor of Education
• Gonzaga University, Master of Science in Nursing
• Pacific Lutheran University, Master of Science in Nursing
• Seattle Pacific University, Master of Science in Nursing

Nurses who complete these tracks can be expected to both be more likely to become nurse educators once they re-enter the job market, and be well-prepared to teach and train nurses at a high level.

HB 1344 will not only help increase the educational attainment of some of Washington’s most important healthcare providers, but it will fulfill an important workforce need in the healthcare system. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.