



Coronavirus Omnibus Legislation (HB197) – RN and LPN Initial Licensing **March 27, 2020**

Coronavirus Omnibus Legislation (HB197) signed by Governor DeWine on March 27, 2020

Coronavirus Omnibus Legislation (HB197) Licensing Authorization

The law suspends, for the period of the COVID-19 emergency, the law requiring an applicant for licensure by examination to have passed the national standardized licensure examination approved by the Ohio Board of Nursing (Board).

The law authorizes the Board to issue licenses to practice as a RN or LPN to applicants who meet the remaining legal requirements, including completing a Board-approved nursing education program and criminal records check.

The license will be valid until whichever of the following dates occurs first: (1) the date that is ninety days after December 1, 2020; (2) the date that is ninety days after the duration of the period of the emergency declared by Executive Order 2020-01D.

Background

Currently, there are an estimated 4,000 to 5,000¹ nursing education students who are in the last semester of their programs (or have just completed the last semester) and would be eligible to take the national licensing examination. Ohio law requires that in order to be licensed as a RN or LPN, the nursing program graduate take a national license examination of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), or any other national standardized nursing examination. Section 4723.09, ORC; 4723.10, ORC. NCSBN develops and administers two nurse license examinations, which are the only national standardized exams: the NCSBN Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and the NCSBN Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN). These examinations are used by all U.S. states/territories to test entry-level nursing competence of candidates for licensure. NCSBN administers the examination through Pearson VUE in testing sites. Pearson VUE issued a statement suspending all testing on March 17, 2020. On March 25, 2020, some sites across the country opened, but without providing full testing capacity, the NCLEX will continue to be unavailable to the majority of candidates.

Impact for Workforce and Public Protection Measures

This law will potentially place 4,000 to 5,000 additional health care providers in the workforce. In balancing public safety, in order to issue licenses, the law requires that the Board of Nursing receive documentation from nursing programs that the applicant has successfully completed the program (Completion Letters). This assures that the applicants, although they have not passed the national examination, have obtained the necessary education to engage in safe nursing practice. This also prevents imposters from obtaining licenses. In addition, as another public protection measure, criminal records checks will continue to be required.

¹ These numbers are based on the numbers of nursing students completing education programs from March 1, 2019 through June 15, 2019, i.e.: RN students (3,999); LPN students (650).

Applying for Initial Licensure as a RN or LPN During the COVID-19 Emergency

To apply, complete the steps below. Detailed information about all aspects of licensing can be found at www.nursing.ohio.gov.

1. Submit an application online, by going to www.nursing.ohio.gov and click on the large red button in the middle of the front page, "Licensing-Apply/Renew Online"
2. Pay the application fee when submitting the application
3. Provide evidence of nursing education program completion; the education program must submit a Program Completion Letter directly to the Board
4. Complete a criminal records check that includes BCI and FBI checks

Processing RN and LPN Initial Licenses

Board staff are working remotely and continuing ALL Board operations. Additional resources have been assigned to licensing and all licensing has been expedited.

The Board expects a minimum of 5,000 applicants for initial licenses and even with additional resources and working as quickly as possible, there may be some delays. Please know we are diligently processing applications as quickly as possible.

Also, please be aware that we cannot issue the initial license without a Program Completion Letter from your education program and a completed Criminal Records Checks (CRCs). Information regarding CRCs is located on the Board website under Licensing & Certification tab at the top.

While we are striving to return emails, our primary focus is to issue licenses as quickly as possible, so responses to calls and emails will be delayed. To see if you have been issued a license, go to www.nursing.ohio.gov and click on the large red button, "License Search," and check for your name. To check on the status of documents submitted, sign into your eLicense account, click options, then click review status.

We appreciate your understanding and know how vital nursing care and a nursing workforce is during the pandemic.

Public Protection and Program Completion Letters

In balancing public safety, in order to issue licenses, the law requires that the Board receive Program Completion Letters from nursing programs that the applicant has successfully completed the program. This assures that the applicants, although they have not passed the NCLEX, have obtained the necessary education to engage in safe nursing practice. This also prevents imposters from obtaining licenses.

Program Administrators are to continue the current practice of emailing Completion Letters to the Board. This will assure Completion Letters are received and processed. Do NOT mail them by USPS.