

The Florida Senate

## BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services

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BILL: CS/CS/SB 36

INTRODUCER: Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services; Health Policy Committee; and Senator Sharief and others

SUBJECT: Use of Professional Nursing Titles

DATE: February 16, 2026 REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1. Smith	Brown	HP	<u>Fav/CS</u>
2. Gerbrandt	McKnight	AHS	<u>Fav/CS</u>
3. _____	_____	RC	_____

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**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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### I. Summary:

CS/CS/SB 36 explicitly authorizes advanced practice registered nurses to use the titles “Doctor of Nursing Practice” or “Doctor of Philosophy” and the corresponding abbreviations, “D.N.P.” or “Ph.D.,” if the nurse holds that doctoral degree. The bill prohibits an APRN who holds a doctoral degree from using the title “doctor” in advertising, that he or she directly produces, without clearly specifying his or her profession.

The bill has no fiscal impact on state expenditures or revenues. **See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.**

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

### II. Present Situation:

#### Nurse Licensure and Regulation

The Division of Medical Quality Assurance (MQA), within the Department of Health (DOH), has general regulatory authority over Florida’s licensed health care practitioners. The MQA works in conjunction with the Board of Nursing (Board) to license and regulate approximately 50,378 advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), 62,230 licensed practical nurses (LPNs), and 347,857 registered nurses (RNs) who are practicing in Florida under an active Florida

license.<sup>1</sup> The DOH and the Board also regulate approximately 4,195 RNs and 549 LPNs from other states who are authorized to practice in Florida through the Nurse Licensure Compact.<sup>2</sup>

To become initially licensed as an LPN or RN in Florida, an applicant must have completed an accredited or Board-approved pre-licensure nursing education program and passed the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Licensure Examination (NCLEX).<sup>3</sup> Nurses licensed in other states may apply for licensure by endorsement under the Mobile Opportunity by Interstate Licensure Endorsement (MOBILE) Act.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Florida is a member of the Nurse Licensure Compact which enables RNs and LPNs licensed to practice in other compact states to be able to practice in Florida if they have been issued a multistate license under the compact.<sup>5</sup>

Within the nursing profession, there are two primary categories of licensure: practical nurses and professional nurses. The Nurse Practice Act, codified within part I of ch. 464, F.S., distinguishes between the practice of practical nursing and the practice of professional nursing.

*Practical nursing* consists of performing selected nursing acts, such as administering treatments and medications, under the direction of a registered nurse, physician, or certain other licensed health care providers. It focuses on the care of individuals who are ill or infirm, and on promoting wellness and preventing illness.<sup>6</sup>

*Professional nursing* involves the performance of acts that require substantial, specialized knowledge, judgment, and skill based on scientific principles from the psychological, biological, physical, and social sciences. This includes comprehensive responsibilities such as assessing and diagnosing patient needs, planning and evaluating care, administering treatments and medications under proper authorization, and supervising or teaching others in the performance of these duties.<sup>7</sup>

The licensed practical nurses (LPNs) are licensed to practice practical nursing under supervision whereas the registered (professional) nurses (RNs) are licensed to practice professional nursing. The RNs who complete additional graduate- or doctoral-level education may obtain licensure as an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN). In Florida, The APRNs are licensed in one or more of the following roles: nurse practitioner (NP), certified nurse midwife (CNM), clinical nurse specialist (CNS), psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner, and certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA).<sup>8</sup>

The APRNs seeking to register to practice primary care autonomously, i.e. without physician supervision, must complete 3,000 clinical practice hours, which may include clinical instruction

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Health, Division of Medical Quality Assurance, *Annual Report and Long-Range Plan, Fiscal Year 2024-25*, at 10, available at <https://mqawebteam.com/annualreports/2425/2/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Section 464.008, F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Section 456.0145, F.S.

<sup>5</sup> Section 464.0095, F.S. *See also* National Council of State Boards of Nursing, *Participating Jurisdictions*, available at <https://www.nursecompact.com/index.page#map> (last visited Jan. 28, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> Section 464.003(18), F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 464.003(19), F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 464.003(3), F.S.

provided by faculty in a clinical setting in a graduate program leading to a master's or doctoral degree in a clinical nursing specialty area.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Post-licensure Nursing Programs***

A post-licensure nursing program is a nursing education program designed for people who are already licensed as nurses, most commonly RNs, who want to build upon their existing clinical foundation to advance their education, role, or specialty. Common programs include:

- Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN);
- Master of Science in Nursing (MSN);
- Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP);
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.); and
- Specialty nursing certificates.

The Florida Center for Nursing reported that in 2023, 11.9 percent of Florida APRNs and 1.1 percent of RNs hold a DNP or a Ph.D. in nursing.<sup>10</sup>

A DNP degree focuses on advanced clinical practice and leadership. The DNP programs emphasize evidence-based care, system improvement, and public health, addressing Florida's health care needs, and managing chronic conditions.<sup>11</sup>

A Ph.D. degree in nursing is research-focused and prepares nurses for careers as nurse scientists in primarily academic settings.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Titles and Abbreviations***

Within the Nurse Practice Act, s. 464.015, F.S., restricts the use of nursing titles and corresponding abbreviations such as RN, LPN, APRN, unless the individual holds a license as such. Title violations under this section are a misdemeanor of the first degree.<sup>13</sup>

Section 464.018, F.S., details the specific acts that can lead to a denial of a license or disciplinary action by the Board of Nursing, and the acts include violating any provision of ch. 456, F.S.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter 456, F.S., outlines the general grounds for discipline and applicable penalties for all health care professions, and the relevant board of each profession are authorized to impose penalties for violations.<sup>15</sup> The following two acts are considered violations under s. 456.072, F.S.:

- Making misleading, deceptive, or fraudulent representations in or related to the practice of the licensee's profession.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Section 464.0123(1)(c), F.S.

<sup>10</sup> Florida Center for Nursing, *State of the Nursing Workforce in Florida 2023*, at 15, available at [https://issuu.com/fcenterfornursing/docs/state\\_of\\_the\\_nursing\\_workforce\\_in\\_florida?ff](https://issuu.com/fcenterfornursing/docs/state_of_the_nursing_workforce_in_florida?ff) (last visited Jan. 28, 2026).

<sup>11</sup> Department of Health, *SB 36 Legislative Bill Analysis* (Dec. 8, 2025) (on file with the Senate Committee on Health Policy).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Section 464.015(10), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> Section 464.018(1)(o), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 456.072(2), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 456.072(1)(a), F.S.

- Failing to identify through written notice, which may include the wearing of a name tag, or orally to a patient the type of license under which the practitioner is practicing.<sup>17</sup>

For a nurse who violates either provision, the penalty can range from a reprimand and a \$250 fine up to a \$700 fine and license suspension.<sup>18</sup>

Current law does not explicitly authorize or prohibit the use of the titles “Doctor of Nursing Practice” or “Doctor of Philosophy” and the corresponding abbreviations, “D.N.P.” or “Ph.D.,” for persons who do not hold those degrees.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The bill amends s. 464.015, F.S., to authorize advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) licensed under ch. 464, F.S., to use the titles “Doctor of Nursing Practice” or “Doctor of Philosophy” and the corresponding abbreviations, “D.N.P.” or “Ph.D.,” if the nurse holds that doctoral degree.

The bill provides that such APRN who is authorized above to use a title or abbreviation associated with a doctoral degree in a clinical setting may not hold himself or herself out as a doctor to patients or prospective patients in advertising, that he or she directly produces, using an authorized title or abbreviation without also clearly denoting his or her licensed profession.

The bill exempts title violations under this section from being considered a first-degree misdemeanor. Instead, these violations constitute grounds for disciplinary action under the s. 416.018(1)(o), F.S. (the Nurse Practice Act). This section allows the Board of Nursing to fine or discipline a licensee for title violations.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None identified.

#### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None identified.

#### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None identified.

#### **D. State Tax or Fee Increases:**

None identified.

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<sup>17</sup> Section 456.072(1)(t), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Rule 64B9-8.006, F.A.C.

**E. Other Constitutional Issues:**

None identified.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:****A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None identified.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None identified.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The bill has no fiscal impact on state expenditures or revenues.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None identified.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None identified.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 464.015 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS/CS by Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services on February 12, 2026:**

The committee substitute:

- Authorizes an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) who holds a doctorate degree (Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Nursing Practice) to use specific titles or abbreviations associated with his or her degree in a manner consistent with that degree.
- Provides that such APRN who is authorized above to use a title or abbreviation associated with a doctoral degree in a clinical setting may not hold himself or herself out as a doctor to patients or prospective patients in advertising, that he or she directly produces, using an authorized title or abbreviation without also clearly denoting his or her licensed profession.
- Provides that violations of the above provisions constitute grounds for discipline under the Nurse Practice Act.

**CS by Health Policy on February 2, 2026:**

The CS clarifies that a licensed nurse may use certain titles and abbreviations consistent with the doctoral degree the nurse has obtained. By removing the word “only” from the underlying bill, out-of-state degree holders are allowed to use the titles and abbreviations enumerated in the bill. Rather than requiring all doctoral degree holders to specify their profession when using the title “doctor,” the CS provides that a nurse who holds a doctoral degree may not use the title “doctor” in a clinical setting without clearly specifying his or her profession.

**B. Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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