

**Testimony by Jaines Andrades, DNP, AGACNP-BC, Baystate Health**

**Hearing: “What can Congress Do to Address the Severe Shortage of Minority Health Care Professionals and the Maternal Health Crisis?” Thursday, May 2, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.**

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Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Dr. Cassidy, I am Jaines Andrades, a nurse practitioner at Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, Massachusetts. It is an honor to present my testimony before this committee today. I thank you for the opportunity and your attention to addressing the shortage of minority health care professionals.

I want to tell you a little bit about my experience and offer you some insight into ways I believe Congress could help increase the number of minority health care professionals in the future.

Currently, I work as a nurse practitioner in the trauma and surgery unit at Baystate Medical Center. That is not exactly where my journey in health care began – but in some ways, it is close.

I went to high school in Springfield, Massachusetts, at Putnam High School, an urban vocational high school that frequently failed to meet state standards. I was enrolled in the cosmetology program but had dreams of becoming a lawyer. As time passed, I struggled to figure out how to make that dream come true, coming from a single-parent home, where my mother didn't have the means to save for college or law school. I was fortunate, though, that she did have the drive to instill a strong work ethic and the foresight to encourage me to contemplate my talents and career which would offer economic stability. Not every kid has that behind them.

One day, I was at a medical appointment with my mom, and a nurse started talking to me about the opportunities nursing offered. I was intrigued.

To get a better sense of how I would fare on the path to becoming a nurse, I started taking courses at Holyoke Community College. I took prerequisites for programs to become a registered nurse, eventually enrolling at Elms College to earn my BSN.

While I was going to school, I wanted to work to support myself, and thought taking a job at a hospital, to get my foot in the door and learn more about health care, would only benefit me in the long run.

So, I began working in “environmental services,” as a custodian, at Baystate Medical Center. I worked to keep surgery and procedure rooms clean. This allowed me to see, first-hand, what

nurses did, what I would need to know to move ahead in a health care environment, and to get advice on how to proceed in my career. My colleagues also offered incredible insight into ways I hadn't thought of to fund my education. They pointed me toward resources like the Western Mass Community Foundation, where I had access to scholarships and interest-free loans. Without my colleagues, I would not have been able to find such resources, which I believe were instrumental to my education. These resources need to be made more visible and accessible to students.

I proceeded through nursing school and stayed at Baystate in environmental services for quite some time, waiting for a nursing opportunity. Eventually, I was hired as a nurse at one of our community health centers. There, again with the support of my colleagues, I was encouraged to earn my doctor of nursing practice degree.

I did that at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was not easy. I eventually came "full circle" and took a job as a nurse practitioner in trauma and surgery back at Baystate Medical Center.

Looking back on my own experience, if I could make suggestions to lawmakers on how to improve the shortage of minority health care providers, I would offer a few thoughts.

First, I would say robust college and career planning is very critical. Making students at all schools, most especially those in lower-income areas, aware of health care as an attainable career opportunity would go far. Letting these students know it is within their reach and that there are resources available to them as they embark on the journey to higher education is key.

At Baystate, we have a program called the Baystate Springfield Educational Partnership, or BSEP. This is a program for youth in Springfield, which helps connect them with hospital-based learning and opportunities to learn about different professions within the health care system. It allows students to engage with professionals, and learn from them, like I did working alongside them as a custodian, but while they are still in high school and evaluating their options. I did not go through this program myself, but I would recommend supporting similar opportunities for minority youth for early professional mentorship. There are a number of physicians, physician's assistants, and nurse practitioners who entered the program as high school students and now work for Baystate Health. Many of them also fill other roles in the Baystate system while advancing their education. I believe federal support for programs like this could lead to many more minority students embarking on prosperous careers in health care.

Another way to make this journey more accessible is tuition-free community college. This would allow students to begin their education without taking on a financial burden. The opportunity to begin to pursue the education needed to become a professional health care provider at a community college should not be underestimated.

Additionally, state and federal grants to reduce loan costs would make these career paths a more appealing option. Helping fund the education of minority students interested in becoming professional health care providers is a wise investment; it fills in-demand jobs in the health care

field and connects people with practical careers which will allow them economic stability to support themselves and their families.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and share my experience and insight with you. I appreciate your consideration of my recommendations and thank you in advance for your questions.