



NEHA represents more than 7,600 government, private, academic, and uniformed services sector environmental public health professionals in the U.S., its territories, and internationally. This workforce represents the second largest constituency of the existing public health workforce, second only to nursing. NEHA is the profession's strongest advocate for excellence in the practice of environmental public health. We deliver on our mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental public health workforce.

December 9, 2025

Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC

Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC

Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC

Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC

Dear Chairs Aderholt and Capito, Ranking Members DeLauro and Baldwin;

The Department of Education's proposed definition of "professional degree" under implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1) would exclude the Master of Public Health (MPH) and Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) degrees. These changes would create major barriers for students and weaken the public health workforce, including environmental health. MPH and DrPH degrees already function as "professional" credentials across government, academic and the public health world. Losing access to the higher federal loan limits tied to the "professional degree" status would directly harm workforce readiness at a time when state and local public health agencies and communities need more trained environmental public health professionals, not fewer.

Public health degrees, particularly MPHs and DrPHs, prepare leaders who protect communities from emerging environmental threats, respond to public health emergencies, and strengthen environmental health systems. These degrees have been offered for over 100 years, and have become an essential part of the environmental public health profession. Public health graduates fill essential roles in federal, state and local environmental health agencies, as well as community

organizations. Recognition as “professional degrees” ensures environmental health students and professionals have access the financial support they need to enter the environmental public health workforce.

The environmental public health community relies on these degrees. Environmental health professionals ensure that food is safe, water is clean, air is fresh, and threats from the environment are limited. This vocation demands a degreed profession to ensure a science-based response to these environmental threats.

Students may lose access to higher federal loan limits and other benefits tied to professional degree status. Increased financial barriers could reduce enrollment or prevent students from completing their degrees. Federal, state and local agencies, accrediting bodies, and employers treat the MPH and DrPH as professional credentials required for practice in the environmental health profession. Elimination of this status will upend the standards to enter and advance in the profession.

“Professional degrees” are defined by the Department of Education as academic programs that prepare graduates for specific professions requiring advanced knowledge and applied skills. Public health degrees, including the MPH and DrPH, meet this definition because they provide specialized training for careers in environmental health. Public health training ensures training in epidemiology, biostatistics, health policy, health education, emergency preparedness, and other environmental public health practice areas essential to the profession.

Without financial support from Federal resources, public health as a field of study could cease to exist. Environmental public health workforce shortages will worsen, and the profession will suffer, especially in underserved and rural communities.

NEHA respectfully request that your office:

- Review the [Department of Education’s proposal](#) and urge the agency to revise the definition so that public health degrees remain included.
- Support or introduce legislation that protects the eligibility of MPH, DrPH, and related degrees for all federal supports linked to “professional degree” status.

Thank you for your time and for supporting the environmental public health professionals who serve communities to promote the nation’s health and make us all healthier.

Sincerely,



**Larry Ramdin, MPH, MA, REHS/RS, CP-FS, HHS, CHO**

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