



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Lela announces interest-free student loan program for nurses** HELP Nurses program to help address nurse shortage in Louisiana

BATON ROUGE—In an effort to help ease a severe shortage of registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, the Louisiana Education Loan Authority (Lela) announced today it will provide interest-free education loans to nursing students who remain and work full time in Louisiana after graduation.

The Higher Education Loan Program for Nurses (HELP Nurses) by Lela applies to federal Stafford loans and Grad PLUS loans obtained through Lela's SuperTop program. Stafford loans are typically taken out by students to finance their college education. Grad PLUS loans are obtained by students in graduate school to help defray the cost of obtaining their degree.

All Louisiana direct patient care licensed nurses and nurse educators who are employed full time in Louisiana can apply annually – beginning July 1, 2007 – to have the interest waived on their Lela SuperTop Stafford or Grad PLUS loan if the loan was initially disbursed after July 1, 2001. Lela, a division of the Louisiana Public Facilities Authority, is one of the largest providers of student loans in Louisiana. Lela's mission is making higher education more accessible and affordable to the people of Louisiana. Lela's parent, the LPFA, is a non-profit public trust that operates on self-generated revenue with no appropriation from the state or any other governmental agency.

"Louisiana was facing a serious shortage of nurses prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita—a situation that has since been made even more severe," said James W. Parks II, president and CEO of the LPFA. "Our goal for the HELP Nurses program is to make it easier for nursing students to finance their education and to remain in Louisiana after they graduate."

Nurses who qualify for HELP Nurses pay only the principal balances of their Stafford or Grad PLUS loans. For example, on a \$20,000 Stafford loan with no discounts, payments are reduced from \$230 to \$166 per month, and the total savings in interest over the life of the loan is about \$7,619.

According to the Louisiana Health Works Commission, Louisiana has an estimated shortage of 4,000 to 5,000 registered nurses and 2,500 licensed practical nurses. As more New Orleans area hospitals re-open, those shortages are expected to jump to about 6,000 for registered nurses and 3,500 for licensed practical nurses. Since the 2005 hurricanes, starting salaries for nurses in Louisiana have jumped to about \$50,000, according to Louisiana Health Works.

The Louisiana Nursing Supply and Demand Commission reports that 14,785 students were enrolled in registered nurse programs in 2006, an increase of 10 percent over 2005.

Students can obtain more information about participating in Lela's HELP Nurses student loan program by calling (800) 228-4755 or visiting the Lela web site at [www.lela.org](http://www.lela.org)  
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