

Health Works Commission Meeting

Thursday, March 5, 2026

10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Thomas Jefferson Room (1-136), 1st Floor of the Claiborne Building

1201 N. 3rd Street

Baton Rouge, LA 70802

I. HEALTH WORKS COMMISSION

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Demetrius Porche called the March Health Works Commission meeting to order at

10:06 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Mellynn Baker called the roll and a quorum was established.

Members Present	Affiliation
Drew Maranto	LA Department of Health
Mike Singletary	LA Nursing Home Association
Christi Marceaux (designee)	Senate Committee on Health & Welfare
Mellynn Baker (designee)	Commissioner of Higher Education
Aimee Cloyd	Nursing Supply & Demand Committee
Sharon Dunn	LA State University Health Sciences Center, Shreveport
Wendi Palermo	LA Community & Technical College System
Jeffery Thompson (designee)	LA Association of Independent Colleges & Universities
Jeannine O'Rourke (designee)	University of LA System
Christina Costanza	LA State Board of Practical Nurse Examiners
Sandra Brown	Southern University System
Demetrius Porche (chair)	LA State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans
Debbie Ford (designee)	LA State Nurses Association
Members Absent	Affiliation
Emily DiPalma	LA Workforce Commission
Paul Salles	LA Hospital Association
Rep. Chris Turner	House Committee on Health & Welfare
Austin Lewis	Governor's Office
Karen Lyon	LA State Board of Nursing
Bruce Greenstein	LA Department of Health
Kaffia Arvie	Occupational Forecasting Conference
Jeffery Williams	LA State Medical Society
Ragan LeBlanc	LA Academy of Family Physician's
Kathy Baldrige	LA Association of Nurse Practitioners

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 5, 2025, MEETING MINUTES

Dr. Porche called for a motion to approve December 5, 2025, minutes.

On the motion of Mr. Drew Maranto, seconded by Dr. Sharon Dunn, the minutes were approved.

Ms. Mellynn Baker, Board of Regents, reviewed the December draft of the annual report, which incorporated data from Dr. Ali Bustamante and feedback from Commission members. The report is scheduled for submission to the Legislature in February. She highlighted the creation of regional one-page summaries and shared a draft, requesting further feedback before finalization while noting ongoing efforts to improve clarity and readability. There were questions around certain data points, particularly a low median salary for physical therapy assistants, leading to plans for verification. Members acknowledged that salary figures can vary due to factors like part-time work or certification differences and discussed the usefulness of including such data.

HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE RESEARCH/KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO POLICY CENTER

Ms. Baker introduced Dr. Stephen Barnes, Director of the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, to share insights into ongoing research helping to develop the state's budget projections. Dr. Barnes provided an overview of ongoing work at the Blanco Center, emphasizing that the initiative is in its early stages and intended to create a long-term pipeline of data to inform policy and workforce decisions, including those related to healthcare. He introduced LA FIRST, a statewide data system established in 2023 to link data across agencies and track individuals from education through employment, enabling deeper insights into workforce outcomes. Initial reports, including the Louisiana Employment

Outcomes Report, analyzed trends in education, employment, and earnings, with early findings showing strong alignment between nursing education and employment, though some gaps and data limitations remain. He noted that the analysis also highlights workforce trends such as wage growth, career mobility, and potential challenges like worker attrition and competition from other industries. Dr. Barnes stressed that this work is meant to spark ongoing collaboration and feedback to guide future research as well as better support decision-making.

Commission members discussed the importance of building career pathways in healthcare by starting individuals in entry-level roles and supporting ongoing education. They emphasized the value of data in guiding these efforts, while stressing that data security is a top priority. Ongoing, legislatively mandated work is already producing useful reports, and members welcome feedback to improve their relevance. Dr. Barnes noted that while confidentiality is critical, the organization aims to collaborate and support initiatives, guided by state partners.

Members also raised concerns about nurses leaving for higher-paying contract jobs in other states, creating staffing and cost challenges. There was agreement that incorporating broader, multi-state, and national data, such as salary and workforce trends from nursing associations, could provide better context. While Louisiana's data system is still developing, members expressed openness to future collaboration with other states, depending on policy and data-sharing agreements.

Dr. Porche thanked Dr. Barnes, then transitioned to the Nursing Supply and Demand Committee.

II. NURSING SUPPLY & DEMAND COMMITTEE

Ms. Aimee Cloyd called the March meeting of the Nursing Supply & Demand Committee to order 10:48 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Baker called the roll and a quorum was established.

Members Present	Affiliation
Christina Costanza	LA State Board of Practical Nurse Examiner
Mike Singletary	LA Nursing Home Association
Debbie Ford (designee)	LA State Nurses Association
Aimee Cloyd	LA Hospital Association
Mellynn Baker (designee)	Board of Regents
Kelly Lanigan	Office of Public Health
Kristine Stout	LA Council of Administrators of Nursing Education
Jennifer Badeaux	LA Association of Nurse Anesthetists
Laurence Vincent	LA Organization of Nurse Leadership
Nathalie Walker	LA Council of Perioperative Registered Nurses
Sandra Brown	Southern University School of Nursing
Wendi Palermo	LA Community & Technical College System
Members Absent	Affiliation
Karen Lyon	LA State Board of Nursing
Bronwyn Doyle	LA Association of Independent Colleges & Universities
Velma Johnson	New Orleans Black Nurses Association
Kathy Baldrige	LA Association of Nurse Practitioners

NURSING SUPPLY & DEMAND COMMITTEE UPDATES

Ms. Cloyd discussed the need to better understand and integrate available data to improve future nursing workforce reports. Members noted that past reports relied on fragmented sources and lacked coordinated matching across datasets, including those related to patients, providers, and the workforce. They expressed interest in partnering with data experts to create more comprehensive and aligned reports. Participants also emphasized that combining different data sources can provide a broader context and reveal important workforce trends not visible in a single dataset, such as licensure nuances and career progression from LPN to

RN. Overall, there was strong support for collaboration to produce more accurate and insightful reports in the future.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Cloyd called for a motion to adjourn the Nursing Supply & Demand Committee.

On the motion of Dr. Wendi Palermo, seconded by Ms. Kristine Stout, the meeting adjourned 10:52 a.m.

III. SIMULATION MEDICAL TRAINING & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Dr. Tabitha Jones-Thomas called the Simulation Medical Training & Education Committee to order at 10:53 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Baker called the roll and a quorum was established.

Members Present	Affiliation
Mellynn Baker (designee)	Commissioner of Higher Education
Drew Maranto	Department of Health
Charmaine Cureton	State Superintendent of Education
Daryl Lofaso	LA State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans
Ann Warner	University of LA System
Trudy Williams	Southern University System
Aimme McCauley	LA State University System
Wendi Palermo	LA Community & Technical College System
Tabitha Jones-Thomas	LA Association of Independent Colleges & Universities
Aimee Cloyd	LA Hospital Association
Mike Singletary	LA Nursing Home Association
Evon Smith	LA Ambulance Alliance
Christina Costanza	LA State Board of Practical Nurse Examiners
Rep. Peter Egan	House of Representatives
Lisa Broussard	LA Council of Administrators of Nursing Education
Wenona Bell	Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University
Members Absent	Affiliation
Emily DiPalma	LA Workforce Commission
Kelly Pagidas	LA State University Health Sciences Center, Shreveport
Ashley Orphe	LA Area Health Education Center Program
Vincent Culotta	LA State Board of Medical Examiners
Karen Lyon	LA State Board of Nursing
Sen. Beth Mizell	Senate
Amanda Smith	Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs

Andrew Kilshaw	Governor's Policy Advisor
Brenda Douglas	Tulane School of Medicine
John Lipka	Edvard Via School of Osteopathic Medicine

SIMULATION MEDICAL TRAINING & EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATES

Dr. Tabitha Jones-Thomas outlined the committee's main goals: launching a mentor-mentee program, continuing educational "lunch and learns," and hosting the 2026 Simulation Expo. She noted that a work group is developing the mentor-mentee program, with plans to introduce it at the Expo and allocate funding to support it. She added that two lunch and learn meetings have already been held, covering cost-saving simulation resources and techniques for increasing realism in training. Dr. Jones-Thomas stated that the upcoming Simulation Expo on April 17 is on track, with strong registration and active planning, and that it will also serve as a platform for launching new initiatives.

Ms. Evon Smith from the Louisiana Rural EMS expressed a willingness to collaborate with others to help bring training resources to rural areas, as transporting bulky and heavy simulation equipment to conferences can be difficult, especially for rural communities. The members then shifted to planning for the Simulation Expo. Attendance will be free, with funding provided by the Board of Regents, for the target audience including simulation users across Louisiana from both clinical and academic settings. Dr. Jones-Thomas stated that advertising is primarily done through email outreach and limited social media efforts via participating institutions. She added that the event has a capacity of 250 attendees, and 179 have already registered.

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Jones-Thomas called for a motion to adjourn the Simulation and Medical Training Committee.

On the motion of Dr. Aimee McCauley, seconded by Ms. Aimee Cloyd, the meeting was adjourned 11:00 a.m.

IV. BOARD OF REGENTS REGIONAL HEALTHCARE INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM UPDATES

Dr. Danielle Vauclin, Dean of Fletcher Technical Community College, discussed initiatives to serve underserved bayou communities far from campus. Noting both geographic barriers and regional healthcare worker shortages, FTCC secured funding to launch two programs: a medical assistant (MA) program delivered directly in rural communities and a local cardiovascular sonography program. The MA program offered fully funded training, including tuition, supplies, and support, at remote locations to reduce access barriers. Graduates could continue working while advancing through LPN and RN bridge programs. Dr. Vauclin stated that three cohorts were launched with mixed results: some students completed training and became employed, while retention varied. She added that 18 students earned certifications, gaining financial stability and career opportunities. Testimonials highlighted increased confidence, hope, and motivation to pursue further careers in nursing.

The cardiovascular sonography program, launched later, also showed strong student outcomes. Recruiting instructors has, however, been challenging due to high industry salaries, making faculty retention a key focus moving forward. A discussion highlighted the impact of FTCC's programs, showing how data-driven applications addressed community needs and transformed students' lives. A new MA-to-LPN bridge program began in the fall, with 20 students selected from 80 applicants and plans to expand to 40 per cohort. Early participants are enthusiastic and already planning to continue into further nursing pathways, which demonstrates the program's strong potential and positive student engagement.

Dr. Porche introduced Mr. Drew Maranto to provide an update on the LA Department of Health's H.E.R.O. Fund. Mr. Maranto stated that the H.E.R.O. grant application window closed in mid-January; 67 applications, about 60 fewer than the first round, are currently under review. The total funding requested was around \$28 million, though only about \$6 million is available over the two-year period. He noted that most applications focus on nursing, including LPN-to-RN bridge programs, with a few creative projects and submissions from the ambulance alliance. Mr. Maranto noted challenges in reaching new applicants and providing technical assistance, as many submissions come from experienced grant teams. He stressed that some applications focused on upskilling rather than credentials, which may not fully align with the H.E.R.O. Fund's mission. The committee plans to seek clarifications on a few applications to ensure no opportunities are missed, and final approvals are expected around April–May.

The members held a discussion focused on improving outreach for healthcare grant applications. Suggestions included sending information through healthcare associations and licensing boards to reach more members, especially for EMS. It was proposed to open the application earlier in the year to avoid end-of-year conflicts, while maintaining a typical 60-day submission window for thorough review. The team emphasized careful and fair evaluation of applications and acknowledged that most applicants submit near the deadline.

Dr. Porche thanked Mr. Maranto for the updates.

V. LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RURAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

Dr. Porche introduced Ms. Julie Foster Hagan from the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) to discuss the Rural Health Initiative. Ms. Hagan noted that LDH created the Office for Rural Health Transformation and Sustainability to manage a federal grant to improve rural healthcare. She stated that the state received \$208 million for the first year of a five-year, \$1.4+

billion program from the “One Big Future” law. Ms. Hagan explained that the grant supports six initiatives with 20 funding strategies, focusing substantially on workforce development. Funds are largely unrestricted, and contracts and programs will roll out quickly, with obligations due by September 2026 and spending completed by September 2027. She stated that progress is tracked annually to ensure goals are met and funding continues.

Ms. Hagan stated that the LDH is launching initiatives to strengthen rural healthcare, focusing on technology, innovative care models, prevention, behavioral health, and access to services. Key programs include a Rural H.E.R.O. grant, a Rural Clinician Credit Bank for recruitment and retention bonuses, and new education pathways in partnership with universities and rural facilities. She added that a Rural Health Transformation Advisory Council will guide these efforts, with staff working within communities to build partnerships. Applications for rural programs are expected in April or May.

Dr. Porche thanked Ms. Hagan and introduced Ms. Baker. Ms. Baker noted that the 2026 Regular Legislative Session begins in early March. The group discussed monitoring impacts on healthcare programs.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Dr. Porche called for any public comments. Dr. Cynthia Bienemy from All Things Professional Healthcare Workforce Research stressed the importance of using complete nursing workforce data, requested that future reports include demographics, and asked about attending the Nurses Supply and Demand Committee workgroup meetings.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Porche stated that the next Commission meeting would be held on Thursday, June 18, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. He called for a motion to adjourn the Commission meeting.

On the motion of Ms. Aimee Cloyd, seconded by Ms. Evon Smith, the Commission meeting adjourned at 11:51 a.m.

ADDITIONAL GUESTS

Lisa Deaton

Cynthia Bienemy - All Things Professional Healthcare Workforce Research

Julie Foster Hagan - LDH/ Rural Health Transformation

Danielle Vauclin - Fletcher Technical Community College