

## Purpose:

The following provides an overview of the licensure requirements for three terminal occupations: Registered Nurses (RNs), Certified Public Accountants (CPAs), and Lawyers, Judges, Magistrates, and other judicial workers. This review aims to understand the barriers to entry for STARs into these occupations and how states differ in their requirements for licensure and practice. We examine some of the possible pathways for STARs into these roles and how the share of STARs compares across states with more or less alternative routes available for each occupation.

## Summary:

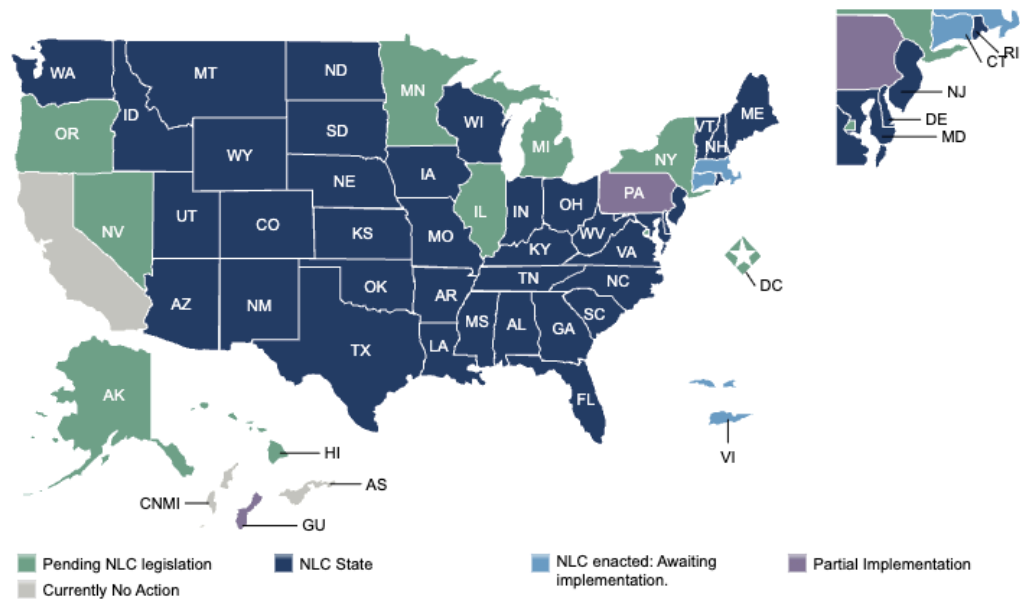
Terminal Role	Overview	National STARs <sup>1</sup>	Primarily Degree Pathway <sup>1</sup>	Alternative Pathway Available <sup>1</sup>
<b>RN</b>	<p>The NCLEX–RN exam is required for RN licensure. Nearly all states accept associate’s degrees to take the NCLEX–RN exam.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York is the only state requiring RNs to obtain a bachelor’s degree (BSN) within 10 years of licensure.</li> <li>• Some states, like PA, have and accept hospital-sponsored diploma programs (not an associate’s degree) that are accepted for the NCLEX–RN exam.</li> <li>• California has a 30-hour credit program for LVNs to take the NCLEX–RN without an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.</li> </ul> <p>STAR share is significantly higher (29%) in Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) states vs. non-NLC states (23%) on average.</p>	1 M STARs 27% of RNs	NY: 50k STARs, 23% of RNs	PA: 41k STARs, 25% of RNs
<b>CPA</b>	<p>All states require a bachelor’s degree (or &gt;120 hours of college credit) to be a CPA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A STAR could be a CPA if they meet the college hour threshold (and the state allows them to sit for the CPA exam), but this would take as much time as a BA (or more) and may still require a bachelor’s or master’s degree to be licensed.</li> <li>• Previously, states may have required less than a BA, but that is not the case anymore.</li> </ul>	185k STARs 11% of accountants and auditors (not strictly CPA)	–	–
<b>Lawyers, judges, magistrates, etc.</b>	<p>A JD is a Juris Doctor degree, and is often required to sit for the bar exam in most states.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some states, like CA, have apprenticeship programs that allow graduates to sit for the bar w/o a JD.</li> </ul>	31k STARs 2.38% of lawyers, judges, etc.	CO: 106 STARs 0.4% of lawyers, judges, etc.	WV: 228 STARs 5.6% of lawyers, judges, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Opportunity@Work analysis of the 2023 1-year ACS, accessed via IPUMS.

## Registered Nurses (RNs)

- **Exam:** To become an RN, you must pass the NCLEX–RN exam in all states. To be eligible for this exam, you must have one of the following: a 30–unit certificate (only available in CA), a hospital–based diploma, ADN, or BSN.
- **NLC (nurse licensure compact):** Once licensed in a participating state, the NLC allows nurses to practice in–person or remote/telehealth practice in other NLC participating states, without obtaining additional licenses. Otherwise, nurses must obtain a license in each state in which they practice.
  - To participate in the NLC, nurses must also meet the Uniform License Requirements (ULR), which includes graduating from a board–approved education program. This could be a diploma program, an associate's degree program (ADN), or a bachelor's degree program (BSN), provided it is approved by the state board of nursing where the nurse is seeking licensure.
  - For more information, visit: [Nurse Licensure Compact](#)

**Figure 1. NLC Overview of State Participation.**



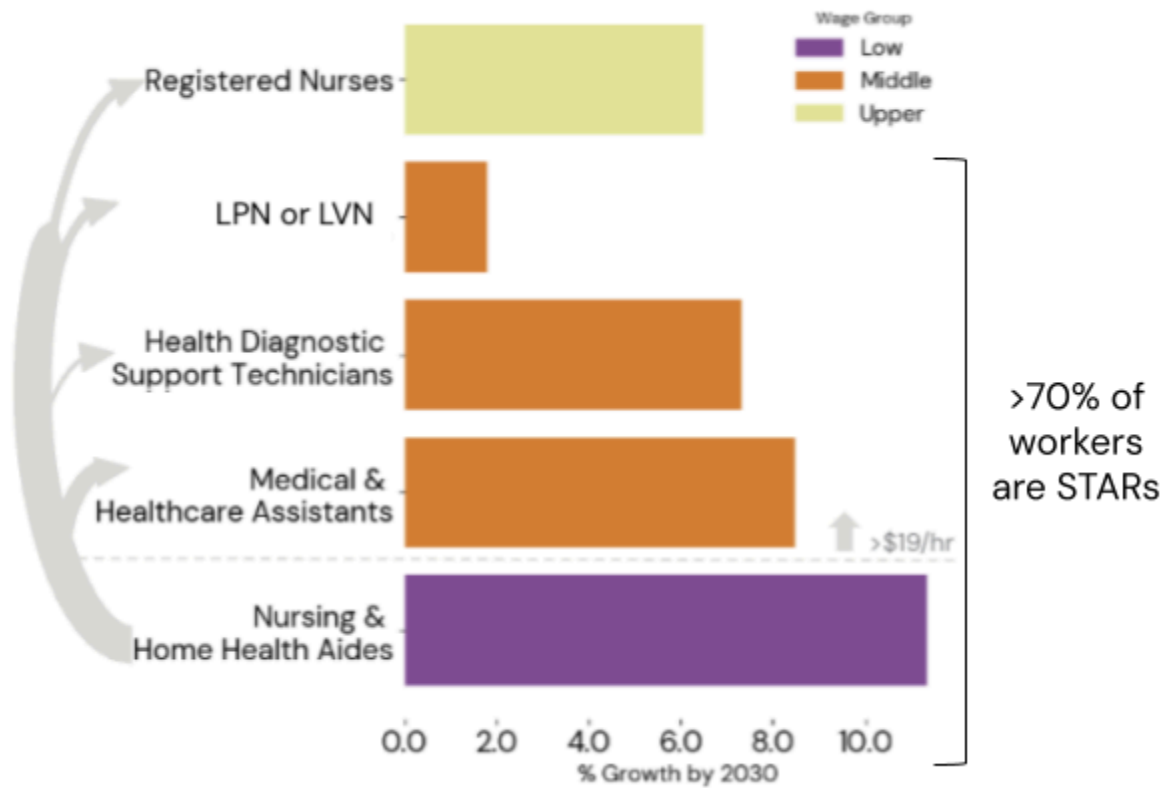
Source: [https://www.nursecompact.com/files/NLC\\_Map.pdf](https://www.nursecompact.com/files/NLC_Map.pdf)

- **Requirements:** The exact requirements for RN licensure vary by state, but nearly all states accept an associate's degree for the NCLEX–RN exam. Some variations in requirements are described below:
  - **BSN:** New York is the only state to strictly require a bachelor's degree (BSN) to remain an RN.

- ["BSN in 10" law mandates that RNs who enter the profession with an Associate Degree in Nursing \(ADN\) or diploma must complete a BSN within 10 years of receiving their initial license to maintain their licensure.](#)
    - From the [New York State Education Department](#): Office of the Professions, RNs should, "have received an education, and a diploma or degree in professional nursing, in accordance with the commissioner's regulations, and in order to continue to maintain registration as a registered professional nurse in New York state, have attained a baccalaureate degree or higher in nursing within ten years of initial licensure in accordance with the commissioner's regulations."
  - **Alternatives to ASN:**
    - **30-unit non-graduate option, California only:** Current LVNs have the option to take the 30-unit option in CA, which allows workers to qualify for the NCLEX-RN exam without an associate's degree or nursing diploma.
      - "Registered Nurses using this option may not be eligible for licensure in states other than California, and may have difficulty applying to a college/university for an advanced degree. This status will not restrict the practice of a Registered Nurse within California." Source: [Rio Hondo College](#)
    - **Diploma:** Hospital-based diploma programs are educational programs that strictly focus on nursing curriculum. Participants earn a diploma instead of an associate's or bachelor's degree.
      - These are declining in number, but some still exist.
      - The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) provides a list of diploma programs in various states [here](#).
      - States with diploma programs: PA, WV, NJ, OH, MA, IL, IN, TX, DE, LA
      - The majority are found in PA.
  - **Accelerated Associate's degrees (ADN):** These can be obtained by workers who already have an LVN or LPN. This option is typically faster than the traditional ADN and can give candidates credit for work completed when obtaining their LPN or LVN certification.
- **Database:**
  - The [NCLS database](#) provides information about licensure requirements in each state. This database provides the current trend for licensure, and does not give a comprehensive list of all pathways available.

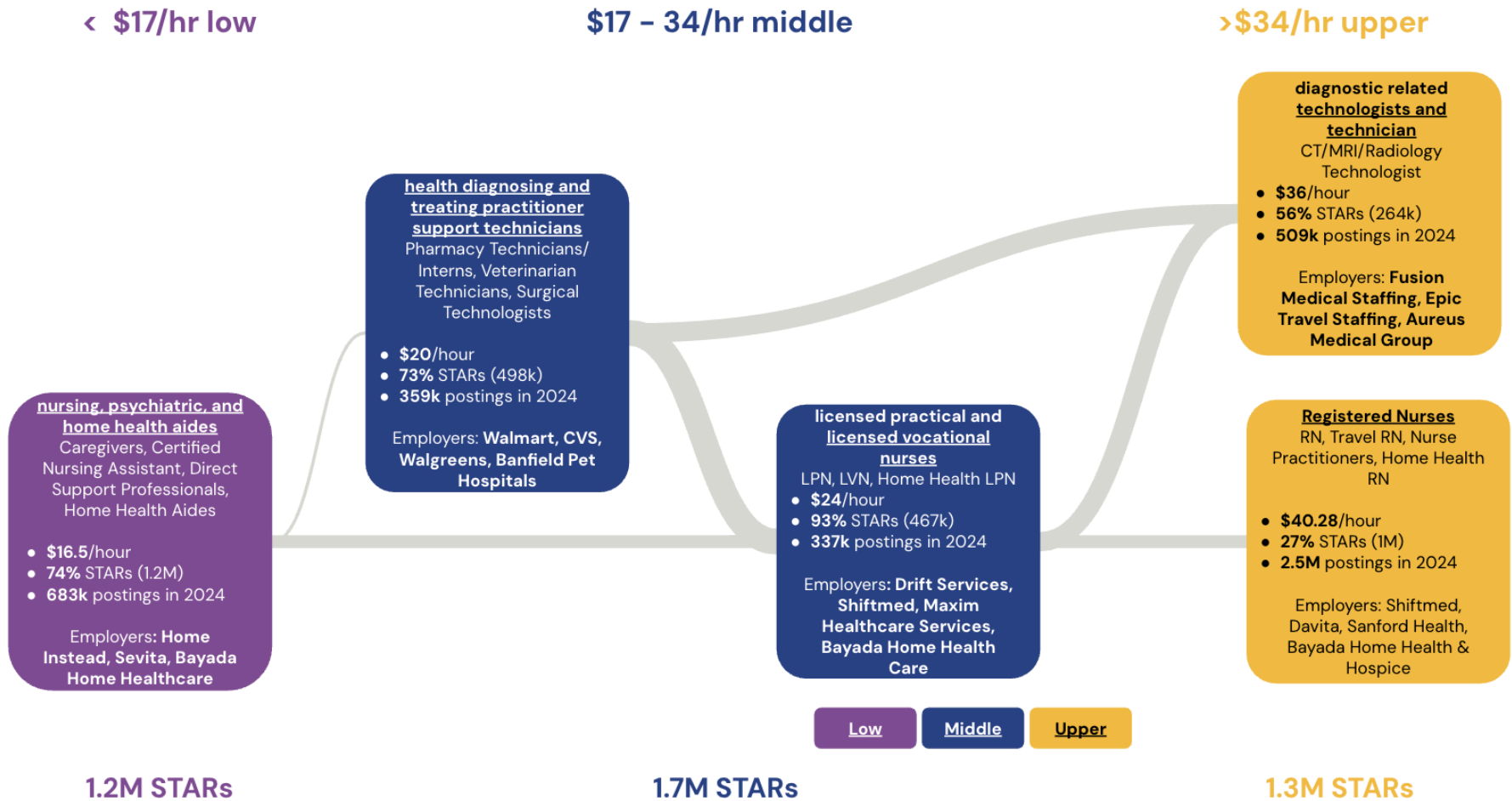
- For example, according to NCLS, Alabama is said to require a BSN for RN licensure, but according to the AL Board of Nursing, the following is true:
      - You must graduate from an approved nursing education program (ADN, BSN, or diploma) – And pass the NCLEX–RN exam.
      - There is no BSN requirement.
      - This may be the “preferred” requirement, but listing only this option limits the view of alternative pathways, particularly for STARs.
- **Analysis:** Next, we aim to understand the composition of STARs who are RNs and how licensure barriers across states can impact STAR share of RN roles. The data presented below from Opportunity@Work’s analysis of the 2023 1-Year American Community Survey, accessed via IPUMS, unless otherwise stated.
  - National: Of 3.84M RNs in the US, 27% are STARs (1.05M workers).
  - NLC States: STAR share is significantly higher (29%) in NLC-participating states vs. non-NLC states (23%) on average (Welch’s t-test,  $p < 0.01$ ).
  - Barriers:
    - CA: has an optional bridge program for LVNs, which may make entrance for STARs easier.
      - 82k STARs, 23% of RNs in California.
    - PA: Has many diploma programs, which may make access easier for STARs
      - 41k STARs, 25% of RNs in Pennsylvania.
    - NY: Requires ADN nurses to obtain a BSN within 10 years, which may limit STAR access over time.
      - 50k STARs, 23% of RNs in New York.
  - National Pathways: Many states provide accelerated LPN, LVN to RN programs. The following figures provide an overview of plausible and realized pathways for STARs to enter Registered Nursing (Figures 2 & 3).

**Figure 2. Registered Nursing is an in-demand occupation.** Nursing and healthcare occupations, such as RNs, are expected to grow in demand by 2030. In occupations like Home Health Aides, STARs gain the relevant skills needed to advance to higher wages.



Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of the 1-year 2023 American Community Survey and the 2023 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, accessed via IPUMS.

**Figure 3. Healthcare Career Pathway to Registered Nursing.** STARs are concentrated across this pathway's lower and middle wage roles. Possibly due to licensing or degree requirements (or internal hiring preferences), the share of STARs is less for RNs than in other roles in this pathway.



Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of the 1-year 2023 ACS, 2023 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, and 2024 Lightcast job postings.

## Certified Public Accountants (CPAs)

- **Exam:** CPAs must pass a four-part Uniform CPA Examination, scored by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and administered by the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA).

Source: [Accounting.com](https://www.accounting.com)

- **Requirements:** A CPA requires 150 hours of coursework (a bachelor's degree is often 120 hours). One can complete extra coursework during their bachelor's degree or complete a master's degree to qualify. Following this, candidates need some experience in professional accounting (varying by state) and then pass the CPA exam. This site provides some information about CPA requirements per state: <https://www.becker.com/cpa-review/requirements>
  - **STARs:** A STAR could become a CPA if they do not have a bachelor's degree, but they have amassed 150 hours of relevant coursework (in some states).
  - **Bachelor's degree:** All states require >120 hrs of college coursework. Many states that require a BA also require that the degree major also be in accounting. Exceptions include AK, GA, HI, ME, and MA, which just require sufficient accounting coursework, but the degree major does not need to be in accounting.
- **Analysis:** The strict occupation CPA is not available in the ACS, but "accountants and auditors" are available. Therefore, the following analysis is based on O@W's analysis of accountants and auditors from the 2023 1-year ACS.
  - There are 185k STARs in the accounting and auditing occupation (occ2010 800), or 11% of the occupation.

## Lawyers, Judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers (JDs)

- **Exam:** To practice law, workers must sit for the bar exam. Most states use the Uniform Bar Exam (UBE), but others retain the non-UBE. Allowing workers who have sat for the non-UBE to practice law would open more pathways for entrance to this occupation. However, the momentum is shifting to the UBE, which will become the NextGen UBE in 2026.
- Most states use the UBE, but even states that do not require the UBE may use components of the UBE. For a detailed list of exams by state, see the National Conference of Bar Examiners [guide from 2022](#).
  - Source: <https://www.ncbex.org/exams>
- **Requirements:**
  - States vary in their requirements to sit for the bar exam. The minimum requirements are generally as follows:
    - No law school: CA, VT, VA, WA
    - Some law school: NY, ME, WV
    - Law School required:
      - Most states require examinees to graduate from an American Bar Association (ABA) accredited or an Association of American Law Schools (AALS)-accredited law school
      - Some allow non-ABA-accredited graduates to sit for the bar. For example, those attending a non-accredited school in AL can sit for the bar if they graduated before 2006.
- **Analysis:** In the 1-year ACS, JD holders are considered “more than a BA” or as a worker with a professional degree. To understand the composition of STARs, the occupation “Lawyers, judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers” was used, but the jobs within this occupation may not necessarily require a JD or JD equivalent.
  - There are 31k STARs considered “lawyers, judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers,” only 2.3% of all workers in this occupation.