

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 3, 2006

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Harkin:

In light of our nation's ongoing nursing and nurse faculty shortages, we respectfully request that the Title VIII nursing education and workforce development programs receive \$175 million in appropriations for FY 2007. Current funding levels for Title VIII fail to meet the rising need for registered nurses (RNs), especially when coupled with repeated rescissions and cuts to other programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration and the Department of Education. The Department of Labor reported in the *Winter 2005-06 Occupational Outlook Quarterly* that America's demand for new and replacement RNs will grow by 29% between 2004 and 2014, to 1.2 million, in order to accommodate growing patient needs and to replace retiring nurses. In the future, RNs will play an even larger role as the 78 million baby boomers age and require additional health care services.

Registered Nurses (RNs) are the primary source of care and support for patients at the most vulnerable points in their lives. Nearly every person's health care experience involves a RN. However, 72% of hospitals reported a shortage of RNs in 2004, according to the American College of Healthcare Executives. This scarcity of RNs has put the lives of patients at risk; the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations found that for roughly a quarter (24%) of hospital patient deaths and injuries, low nursing staff levels were a contributing factor. Therefore, if patients are to receive high quality, safe health care, the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs must receive enough funding to fulfill their Congressionally prescribed mission of ensuring a sufficient national supply of RNs.

Furthermore, RNs are the cornerstone of bioterrorism preparedness and response. In the event of a terrorist attack, nurses evaluate patients, administer vaccines and medications, perform disease surveillance, and train non-licensed staff. The Government Accounting Office reported in 2003 that state and local health officials in many states cited the nursing shortage as an impediment to their bioterrorism preparedness efforts (GAO-03-373).

Due to the lack of funding, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) turned away 82% of applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program and 98% of applicants for the Nursing Scholarship Program in FY 2005. These much-needed programs not only support the education of new nurses, but also direct RNs into areas with the greatest need – including departments of public health, community health centers, nursing homes, and

disproportionate share hospitals. In addition, schools of nursing turned away at least 32,617 qualified students in 2005, due to the shortage of faculty among other capacity-limiting factors, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

Therefore, the nursing and nurse faculty shortages affect our very strength as a nation. Despite the difficult fiscal environment, Congress must do more to address this crisis. We believe that \$175 million for Title VIII nursing education and workforce development programs represents an important investment in the health and productivity of all Americans; we look forward to working with you on a bipartisan basis to provide the necessary funding to help recruit and retain enough nurses to meet our nation's current and future health care needs.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Mikulski

Elizabeth Dole

Blanche L. Lincoln

John McCain

Ken Salazar

John R. Dingens

Maria Cantwell

Barack Obama

Chuck Schumer

Jim Bunning

Susan M. Collins

Jim Jeffords

Dick Durbin

Non Wyden

Tom Kyl

Wendell Karlin

Jon Kyl

Paul Sarbanes

Phil Hartman

Byron T. Dorgan

Frank R. Lautenberg

Mur Feingold

Dianne Feinstein

Pat Roberts

John Johnson

Rick Warren

Patty Murray

Mark Dayton

Al Franken

Chuck H.

John Erisman

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Debbie Stabenow

Chris Dodd

Herb Kohl

Nikki Stenerow

Janice K. Skanska

Jay Rothman

Sam Brownback

Bubba Baker

P. J. Chafee

Joe Lieberman

George Allen

John Warner

Paul Ryan

Tommy Thompson

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Mike DeWine
John Conyn
Ted Kennedy

Allyson Sweeney
Bob Fisher
Kent Conrad
