

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 9, 2005

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

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:

We are writing to request a \$24 million increase for Title VIII nurse education programs, including programs created under the Nurse Reinvestment Act, bringing the total level of funding up to \$175 million for these vital programs in fiscal year 2006.

The United States is currently facing a nursing shortage of critical proportions. In October 2004, the American College of Healthcare Executives reported that 72% of hospital CEO's were experiencing a nursing shortage at their facilities. This shortage is only expected to worsen as the baby boom generation ages and their need for health care grows. The Bureau of Labor statistics has projected that health care facilities will need to fill more than 1.1 million registered nurse job openings by 2012 to accommodate growing patient needs and replacing retiring nurses.

Most importantly, the current nursing shortage poses a significant threat to the ability of our health care system to deliver quality care. Recent studies published in the New England Journal of Medicine and the Journal of the American Medical Association has shown that the nursing shortage is contributing to preventable health care complications. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations has reported that the shortage of nurses contributes to nearly a quarter of all unexpected incidents that kill or injure hospitalized patients.

To address this serious problem Congress passed the Nurse Reinvestment Act (P.L. 107-205) with overwhelming support. The Nurse Reinvestment Act provides scholarships to nursing students who agree to provide at least two years of service in a health care facility with a critical nursing shortage. It creates career ladders to help nurses and other health professionals advance in their careers, provides loan cancellation for nurses with advanced degrees in exchange for teaching at a school of nursing, improves nurse retention by promoting nurse involvement in organizational decision-making, and provides specialized training for nurses.

The Nurse Reinvestment Act builds on existing Title VIII nurse education programs that provide loan repayment to nurses, improve the diversity of the nursing workforce, and expand opportunities for nursing education at all levels. All of these

programs play a vital role in recruiting and retaining nurses and making sure that they have the training that they need to care for patients.

We must, however, invest adequate funding in these programs if they are to fulfill their promise. Current funding levels fail to meet the growing need for nurses. In fiscal year 2004, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) was forced to turn away 82% of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program (NELRP), and 98% of the applicants for the Nursing Scholarship program due to lack of adequate funding. Clearly, we must do more to address the current shortage and ensure that there is an adequate and well-educated supply of nurses to meet our future health care needs.

We believe that \$175 million for Title VIII nursing education programs represents an important investment for patients and look forward to working with you on a bipartisan basis to provide the necessary funding to help recruit and retain more nurses in this country.

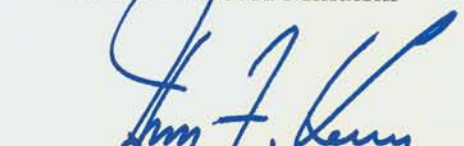
Sincerely,



Senator Barbara Mikulski



Senator Susan Collins



Senator John Kerry



Senator Elizabeth Dole



Senator Byron Dorgan



Senator Pat Roberts



Senator Ron Wyden



Senator Richard Lugar



Senator Richard Durbin



Senator Jim Bunning

Blanche L. Lincoln

Senator Blanche Lincoln

Jon Kyl

Senator Jon Kyl

Jim Jeffords

Senator James Jeffords

Mike DeWine

Senator Mike DeWine

Mark Dayton

Senator Mark Dayton

Olympia Snowe

Senator Olympia Snowe

Patty Murray

Senator Patty Murray

Richard Burr

Senator Richard Burr

Joe Biden

Senator Joseph Biden

Chuck Hagel

Senator Chuck Hagel

Carl Levin

Senator Carl Levin

Kay Hutchison

Senator Kay Hutchison

Ed Kennedy

Senator Edward Kennedy

John Ensign

Senator John Ensign

Patrick Leahy

Senator Patrick Leahy

Jim Talent

Senator James Talent

Chris Dodd

Senator Christopher Dodd

Evan Bayh

Senator Evan Bayh

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Senator Hillary Clinton

Barbara Boxer
Senator Barbara Boxer

Debbie Stabenow
Senator Debbie Stabenow

Tim Johnson
Senator Tim Johnson

Daniel Akaka
Senator Daniel Akaka

Paul Sarbanes
Senator Paul Sarbanes

Charles Schumer
Senator Charles Schumer

Frank R. Lautenberg
Senator Frank Lautenberg

Herb Kohl
Senator Herb Kohl

Dianne Feinstein
Senator Dianne Feinstein

Jon Corzine
Senator Jon Corzine

John Rockefeller
Senator John Rockefeller

Ken Salazar
Senator Ken Salazar

Jeff Bingaman
Senator Jeff Bingaman

Joseph Lieberman
Senator Joseph Lieberman

Barack Obama
Senator Barack Obama

Ben Nelson
Senator Ben Nelson

Maria Cantwell
Senator Maria Cantwell

Russ Feingold

Senator Russell Feingold

L. Chafee

Senator Lincoln Chafee

Jack Reed

Senator Jack Reed

Conrad Burns

Senator Conrad Burns

Mel Martinez

Senator Mel Martinez