

November 12, 2004

Dear Member of Congress:

The organizations listed below, comprising the breadth and scope of the health care delivery system, urge you to support at least the \$20 million increase in nursing workforce development programs approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee. Specifically, we ask you to support \$162 million in FY 2005 funding for Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act through the House/Senate conference.

Our nation is struggling with a growing shortage of RNs. As nurses are the largest health care workforce in the nation, this burgeoning shortage threatens the very fabric of our health and long term care systems. The aging of the nurse workforce, combined with the impending health care needs of the baby boom generation make this shortage all the more urgent. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported this February that registered nursing will have the greatest job growth of all US professions in the time period spanning 2002 – 2012. During this decade, health care facilities will need to fill more than 1.1 million RN job openings. A study conducted by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) states that we must immediately double enrollments in schools of nursing to start meeting this need.

This nursing shortage is already directly impacting patient care. A recent survey of hospitals across the nation concluded nursing shortages are causing emergency department overcrowding and diversions, increased wait times for surgery, discontinued patient care programs, delayed discharges, and canceled surgeries. In long term care, the nursing shortage jeopardizes access to quality care services.

In 2002, Congress passed the Nurse Reinvestment Act (PL 107-205), which expanded and improved the nursing workforce development programs administered by HRSA under Title VIII. This legislation holds the promise of attracting more people into the nursing profession, increasing nurse education capacity, and encouraging practicing nurses to remain in the profession. However, these programs can not properly address the growing shortage without significant new appropriations.

Among other programs, the Nurse Reinvestment Act created the national nurse corps. This program offers loan repayments and scholarships to RNs and nursing students who agree to work full-time for at least two years in a health care facility deemed to have a critical shortage of nurses. In FY 2003, 8,321 nurses applied for the loan repayment program, and 4,512 nursing students applied for the nursing scholarship. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, HRSA could only approve 602 loan repayments and a mere 94 scholarships. Therefore, 92% of the nurses willing to immediately enter facilities hardest hit by the shortage were turned away from the corps, and 98% of the nursing students willing to work in these facilities upon graduation were also denied access to this new program.

We urge you to meet the promise of the Nurse Reinvestment Act by making funding for nursing workforce development a priority. Your support for the \$162 million in FY 2005 funding for Title VIII is crucial to this effort.

Sincerely,  
American Association of Colleges of Nursing  
American Health Care Association  
American Hospital Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Organization of Nurse Executives  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
Federation of American Hospitals  
Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations  
National Center for Assisted Living  
VHA Inc.  
Visiting Nurse Associations of America