

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2004

Honorable Ralph Regula  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Appropriations Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable David Obey  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Appropriations Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Regula and Ranking Member Obey:

We are writing in strong support of retaining at least the \$20 million increase approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee for Title VIII nursing workforce development programs, including Nurse Reinvestment Act programs, in the final version of the fiscal year 2005 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations bill. Earlier this year, 123 Members of Congress wrote to you in support of \$205 million, a \$63 million increase, for these important nursing programs.

The United States is currently facing a nursing shortage of critical proportions. Studies have reported 126,000 registered nurse vacancies in hospitals and 13,900 registered nurse vacancies in nursing homes. In February, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that registered nursing will be the profession with the largest job growth from 2002 - 2012. During this period, health care facilities will need to fill more than 1.1 million registered nurse job openings in order to accommodate growing patient needs and to replace retiring nurses. Yet nursing programs turned away thousands of qualified students last year, due in part to a shortage of faculty.

Most importantly, the nursing shortage poses a significant threat to the ability of our health care system to deliver quality care. A disturbing study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that nursing shortages in hospitals are associated with a higher risk of complications and even death. The study found that patients in hospitals with fewer registered nurses were more likely to suffer from complications like urinary infections and pneumonia, to stay in the hospital longer, and to die from treatable conditions like shock and gastrointestinal bleeding.

To address this serious problem, Congress passed the Nurse Reinvestment Act (P.L. 107-205) with overwhelming bipartisan 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 repayments 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 all these programs if they are to fulfill their promise. In FY 2003, the Health Resources and Services Administration received 8,321 applications for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program, but only had the funds to award 602. They received 4,512 applications for the Nursing Scholarship Program, but were only able to fund 94. 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 urge you to do all you can to keep at least the \$20 million funding increase provided in Senate bill in the final conference report. We appreciate your attention to this critical issue and look forward to working with you on a bipartisan basis to provide this necessary funding to help recruit and retain more nurses in this country.

Sincerely,

Lois Capps

Ed Whitfield

Art Hays

Kit Rye

Joe Hoagel

Jim Cooper

Di Cury

Jan Schakowsky

Hyd Dosselt

R. Simmons

C.A. Della Roppa

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Major Waters

Tom Cantos

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**Signatories to the Nurse Education Funding Letter of November 15, 2004**

Capps  
Whitfield  
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Simmons  
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McIntyre  
Ross  
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