

February 9, 2005

The Honorable Jim Nussle  
Chairman  
Budget Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The organizations listed below, representing the breadth and depth of the nation's health care delivery system, are contacting you to urge you to make funding for Nursing Workforce Development programs a priority in the FY 2006 budget resolution. Specifically, we ask you to increase the Function 550 budget authority to allow for a significant increase in FY 2006 appropriations for Title VIII of Public Health Service Act.

Our nation is struggling with a growing shortage of registered nurses (RNs) that affects our hospitals, nursing facilities, assisted living residences, home health agencies, and public health clinics on a daily basis. Because RNs are the largest health care delivery workforce in the nation, this burgeoning shortage threatens the very fabric of our health care system.

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 last February that registered nursing will have the greatest job growth of all US professions in 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.

The nursing shortage is already directly impacting patient care. A recent survey of hospitals across the nation concluded nursing shortages are causing emergency department overcrowding, emergency department diversions, increased wait times for surgery, discontinued patient care programs or reduced service hours, delayed discharges, and canceled surgeries.

The Nurse Reinvestment Act (P.L. 107-205), a triumph of bipartisan and bicameral efforts, represents an important step toward addressing this growing crisis. It holds the promise of attracting new recruits into the nursing profession and increasing the capacity of our schools of nursing, while improving the work environment to maintain experienced nurses in patient care. Unfortunately, current funding levels are simply failing to meet the need. In FY 2003, HRSA was forced to turn away 92 percent of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program and 98 percent of the applicants for the Nursing Scholarship Program due to lack of adequate funding.

February 9, 2005  
Chairman Nussle  
Page 2

Your support for an increased budget authority for nursing workforce development is necessary to make the promise of the Nurse Reinvestment Act a reality.

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  
National Center for Assisted Living  
Premier  
VHA Inc.  
Visiting Nurse Associations of America