

October 24, 2005

Senator Arlen Specter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Tom Harkin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Harkin:

As you work to finalize FY 2006 funding, we urge you to make a significant investment in Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act) administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Specifically, we support a funding level of at least \$156 million for Title VIII in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. Title VIII programs provide the primary financial support for nursing recruitment, retention, and education.

Nurses 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 Registered Nurse. As a result, a sufficient supply of nurses is critical in providing our Nation's population with quality health care. Nurses are expected to play an even larger role in the future. The U.S. Department of Labor currently projects a 21% increase in the need for nurses nationwide from 1998 to 2008, compared with a 14% increase for all other occupations. This means 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 to replace retiring nurses.

Current funding levels fail to meet the growing need for nurses. In fiscal year 2004, HRSA was forced to turn away 82% of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program, and 98% of the applicants for the Nursing Scholarship program due to lack of funding. These much-needed programs are used to direct RNs into areas with the greatest need – including community health centers, disproportionate share hospitals, and departments of public health. In 1974, Congress appropriated \$153 million for nurse education programs. In today's dollars that appropriation would be worth \$609 million, more than 4 times current spending.

Hurricanes Rita and Katrina have demonstrated that nurses play a crucial role in disaster readiness and response. An adequate supply of nurses is also needed to implement pandemic flu preparations. Now is not the time to short change Nursing Workforce Development programs.

Given adequate resources, Title VIII programs could attract more students into nursing programs, increase the supply of nursing faculty, recruit diverse student population, provide assistance to students to enable them to complete nursing studies, and ensure the collection and

Chairman Specter, and
Ranking Member Harkin
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analysis of current nursing workforce data. Your support for \$156 million in FY 2006 Title VIII funding is vital to maintaining and improving the health of our nation.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Health Care Association
American Hospital Association
American Nurses Association
American Organization of Nurse Executives
Federation of American Hospitals
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
Premier
VHA Inc.
Visiting Nurse Associations of America