

November 17, 2005

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education and Related Agencies  
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Specter:

On behalf of the American Hospital Association (AHA), which represents nearly 5,000 hospitals, health care systems, networks, and other providers of care, I am writing to express our grave concerns about funding levels contained in the conference report for H.R. 3010, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies. While the AHA recognizes the serious fiscal constraints imposed upon the conference committee to stay within the margin of available funding for programs under your jurisdiction, the funding levels included in the conference report for health care programs are inadequate to ensure access to quality health care for many segments of our population.

We have serious concerns about the impact of funding reductions to important rural programs, including Rural Health Outreach Grants, and Rural and Community Access to Emergency Devices and the elimination of funding for Rural Health Research, Rural EMS, the Quentin Burdick Program for Rural Training, the Healthy Community Access Program (CAP) and trauma care. These programs play a significant role in ensuring that needed services remain available to America's rural communities.

We are also concerned about the spending reductions to health professions education programs authorized under Title VII of the Public Health Service Act. The conference report cuts these programs by 69 percent, despite the fact that our nation currently has a shortage of health care professionals. The Title VII programs are intended to ensure that America maintains an adequate, diverse, and well-distributed supply of allied health professionals. A strong cadre of health care professionals is indispensable to our nation's health care infrastructure.

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The AHA strongly supports funding for bioterrorism and hospital preparedness. Unfortunately, funding for this activity has been reduced in the conference report. Funding for this program is especially important to enhance hospitals' capacity to deal with any nuclear, biological or chemical attack. It is especially important to prepare for the threat of a potential outbreak of avian flu.

Lastly, we are disappointed that funding for other important health care programs, including the Maternal-Child Health Block Grants, and health care information technology, have been reduced.

The AHA appreciates and is grateful for the support you have provided to health care programs over the years. However, the spending reductions to the many important health programs that are included in the conference report on H.R. 3010 will make it difficult for many health care providers to continue to maintain quality health care services for the patients they serve. We urge members to reconsider funding levels included in the bill.

Sincerely,

Rick Pollack  
Executive Vice President