

March 1, 2006

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

The Honorable John Spratt  
Ranking Member, Budget Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Nussle and Ranking Member Spratt:

The undersigned organizations urge you to make funding for nursing workforce development programs a priority in the FY 2007 budget resolution. Specifically, we ask you to increase the Function 550 budget authority to allow for a significant increase in appropriations for Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act).

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 (RN). As a result, a sufficient supply of nurses is critical to providing our nation's population with quality health care. Nurses are expected to play an even larger role in the future. The Department of Labor reported in the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* (Winter 2005-06) that America's demand for RNs will grow 29% between 2004 and 2014. During this time period, we will need to produce 1.2 million RNs, to accommodate growing patient needs and to replace retiring nurses.

Current funding levels fail to meet the growing need for nurses. In fiscal year 2005, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) was forced to turn away 82% of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program (NELRP), and 98% of the applicants for the Nursing Scholarship program due to lack of adequate funding. These much-needed programs are used to direct RNs into areas with the greatest need – including departments of public health, community health centers, home health agencies, nursing homes, and disproportionate share hospitals.

Nurses are also the cornerstone of bioterrorism preparedness and response. In the event of a terrorist attack, nurses are needed to evaluate patients, administer vaccines and medications, perform disease surveillance, and train non-licensed staff. The GAO reported in 2003 that state and local health officials in many states cited the nursing shortage as an impediment to their bioterrorism preparedness efforts (GAO-03-373).

The nursing shortage is also stressing military health care delivery. The Army, Navy, and Air Force are offering new lucrative RN recruitment packages that include large sign-on bonuses, generous scholarships, and loan forgiveness packages. Yet, neither the Army nor the Air Force has met their active service nurse recruitment goals since the 1990s. Last year, Army leaders warned the Senate Appropriations Committee that they were experiencing a 30% shortage of certified registered nurse anesthetists. In 2004, the Navy Nurse Corps recruitment fell 32% below target. This ongoing nurse shortage is creating real concerns about the ability to deliver needed health care to today's military.

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Therefore, this shortage impacts our very strength as a nation. We urge you to address this crisis by providing a function 550 allocation that supports full funding for RN recruitment, education, and retention programs.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing  
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging  
American Health Care Association  
American Hospital Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Organization of Nurse Executives  
Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare  
Federation of American Hospitals  
Catholic Health Association  
National Center for Assisted Living  
Oncology Nursing Society  
Premier  
VHA Inc.  
Visiting Nurse Associations of America