

June 2, 2006

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Regula:

The undersigned organizations urge you to make a significant investment in Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act) in your FY 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. Specifically, we request at least \$175 million for these critical programs, which are the largest source of federal funding for nursing education, recruitment, and retention. In FY 2005, these programs assisted over 50,000 students in pursuing their nursing education. Though we recognize the serious fiscal constraints under which you are working, this \$25 million increase over FY 2006 funding is critical to address our nation's nursing shortage.

Nursing represents the largest health profession, with approximately 2.9 million dedicated, trusted professionals delivering primary, acute, and chronic care to millions of Americans. Since 1998, our nation has struggled with a 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. The reasons for the ongoing nursing shortage are complex and affected by changing demographic trends. Our existing nursing workforce is aging; sicker patients require more advanced care and technology; and despite significant efforts to increase enrollments in schools of nursing nationwide, programs are unable to meet the huge demand for RNs. Furthermore, the demand for nursing services is projected to increase considerably beginning in 2010 as the leading edge of the 78 million baby boomers turn 65.

Recent data confirm that this nursing shortage is not showing signs of abating. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has projected that by 2014, our nation will need an additional 1.2 million new and replacement nurses. The American College of Healthcare Executives reported in 2005 that 85% of hospitals were experiencing a nursing shortage. Our nation's 'safety net' of 5,000 community health centers is experiencing an average vacancy rate of 10% for RNs and 9% for nurse practitioners. Even though nursing is identified by BLS as the fastest growing professional occupation, the Health Resources and Services Administration projects that the supply of nurses in the U.S. will fall 29% below demand by 2020 unless there is a significant and sustained increase in the number of nurses graduating and entering the workforce each year.

Despite increasing enrollments every year, schools of nursing cannot educate sufficient numbers of nurses to meet the demand. In a 2005 survey of 567 schools of nursing, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing found that 41,683 qualified applicants were denied admission to education programs primarily because of the lack of faculty. The National League for Nursing

projected in December 2005 that 147,000 qualified candidates were turned away from all nursing programs. Without sufficient numbers of nurse faculty, schools cannot educate the next generation of nurses. The National Center on Healthcare Workforce Analysis estimates that the U.S. needs to graduate approximately 90% more RNs than it did in 2000 to meet the projected growth in demand for RNs in 2020.

Given adequate resources, Title VIII programs would resolve the shortage by increasing the supply of nurse faculty, recruiting diverse student populations, assisting students in completing their nursing studies, ensuring the collection and analysis of current nursing workforce data, and promoting innovation in education and practice. However, these programs remain severely under funded. In FY 2005, HRSA funded only 217 of the 6,500 applicants (6%) for the Nursing Scholarship Program and 803 of the 4,400 applicants (18%) for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program. In addition, the Nurse Faculty Loan Program could only assist 475 graduate students to be nurse educators, not nearly enough to replace those educators that retire each year.

The nursing shortage affects the personal and economic health of our citizens and our nation. We urge you to address this crisis through your support for a \$25 million increase for Nursing Workforce Development 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 Nephrology Nurses' Association
American Nurses Association
American Organization of Nurse Executives
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Federation of American Hospitals
Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
National Center for Assisted Living
Premier
United Health Group/Evercare
VHA Inc.
Visiting Nurse Associations of America