



May 16, 2008

The Honorable James F. Sensenbrenner
United States House of Representatives
2449 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Sensenbrenner:

On behalf of the American Hospital Association (AHA) and the American Society for Healthcare Human Resource Administration (ASHHRA), we are writing to express our support for H.R. 5924, the Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act, which will help alleviate the current nursing shortage.

The AHA represents nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, and 37,000 individual members. ASHHRA represents 3,200 health care human resource managers in hospitals and other health care facilities.

The nation's severe nursing shortage, now in its ninth year, challenges hospitals' ability to operate at full capacity to care for their communities. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that by 2020, our nation will need to add 2.8 million new nurses—1 million more than the projected supply. In addition, in 2006, nearly 150,000 qualified U.S. RN applicants were turned away from domestic nursing schools because of a lack of available classroom slots and faculty. The demand for registered nurses (RNs) will continue to rise with the growing health care needs of 78 million "baby boomers" who will begin to retire in 2010.

In 2006, approximately 15 percent of newly licensed nurses in the U.S. were immigrants. Even with these additions, there were more than 116,000 RN vacancies in U.S. hospitals last year, according to a recent AHA survey. Another national AHA survey of hospitals concluded that nursing shortages are contributing to emergency department overcrowding and diversions, increased wait times for surgery, canceled surgeries, discontinued patient care programs or reduced services hours, and delayed discharges.

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The long-term solution to our nursing shortage requires a substantial expansion of our domestic supply through a considerable increase in nursing school capacity and completion rates. Meanwhile, immigrant nurses are needed in substantial numbers to fill the gap by joining our existing corps of trained, competent nurses.

Current visa caps have reduced the number of immigrant nurses over the past several years. Your bill will help address our current domestic shortage by providing an exemption from current employment-based visa caps for nurses. It also helps address domestic supply by establishing a program to help prepare more nurse educators.

The AHA and ASHHRA applaud your efforts to help address the shortage of nurses and looks forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Rick Pollack
Executive Vice President
American Hospital Association

Jeanene Martin
President
ASHHRA

Catherine Sewell
Executive Director
ASHHRA