

March 30, 2007

The Honorable David Obey  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Walsh  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Walsh:

The undersigned organizations urge you to make a real investment in nursing workforce development a priority in the FY 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act. Specifically, we ask you to provide at least \$200 million in funding for the Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act). These Title VIII programs are the main source of federal support for nursing recruitment, education, and retention.

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 in providing our nation's population with quality health care. Nurses are expected to play an even larger role in the future. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projects that, absent aggressive intervention, the supply of nurses in America will fall 36 percent (more than 1 million nurses) below requirements by the year 2020.

Nurses are also the cornerstone of pandemic flu, disaster, and terrorism preparedness. If any these events were to occur, nurses will be critical to patient treatment and evaluation, vaccine administration, and disease surveillance. The GAO, the American Hospital Association, and the Trust for America's Health have all released reports citing the nursing shortage as a major impediment to these preparedness efforts.

The nursing shortage is stressing military health care delivery. The Army, Navy, and Air Force are offering new lucrative RN recruitment packages, yet neither the Army nor the Air Force has met their active service nurse recruitment goals since the 1990s. The Navy has not met its recruitment goal in four years. Army leaders recently warned that they were experiencing shortfalls or more than 30% in certain key combat specialties (anesthesia and critical care). Air Force Nurse Corp leaders testified earlier this year that their 15% nursing shortage was "gravely concerning."

Current funding levels fail to meet the growing need for nurses. For instance, in FY2006, HRSA was forced to turn away 85% of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program, and 96% of the applicants for the Nursing Scholarship program due to inadequate funding. This means that 10,000 applicants were turned away from programs designed to direct RNs into facilities with the most critical nursing shortages.

Complicating the problem further, faculty shortages at nursing schools across the country are limiting student capacity at a time when the need for professional registered nurses continues to grow. While there was a 12.4% increase in baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs from 2005 to 2006, last year schools of nursing still turned away 42,866 qualified applications primarily due to a shortage of nurse faculty. Current funding to increase the pool of nurse educators does not meet this demand. In FY 2006, schools of nursing requested over three times the funds available in the Title VIII Nurse Faculty Loan Program to educate new nurse faculty.

Appropriations for the Title VIII programs have decreased over the last three fiscal years. We urge you to make this the year that you invest in nursing. Your support for \$200 million in funding for Title VIII will be rewarded by ensuring a sufficient national supply of RNs and improving the quality and safety of our nation's health care.

Sincerely,

AARP

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

Catholic Health Association of the United States

Federation of American Hospitals

The Joint Commission

National Association for Home Care and Hospice

National Center for Assisted Living

Oncology Nursing Society

Premier

VHA Inc.

Visiting Nurse Associations of America