

July 11, 2005

The Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
SH-711
Washington, DC 20510-3802

Dear Senator Specter:

The undersigned organizations urge you to support nursing education in the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. We strongly recommend at least \$175 million in funding for Nursing Workforce Development programs under Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act. We recognize the serious fiscal constraints under which you are working, but know that this \$24 million increase over FY 2005 funding is desperately needed to address our nation's critical nursing shortage.

Every day of the year, 24 hours a day, America's hospitals and health systems, nursing homes, home health agencies, assisted living facilities, and other providers of care keep a fundamental promise to their communities to provide quality care whenever and wherever it is needed. And the people serving in those communities – registered nurses – are dedicated to providing that care. However, our shrinking nursing workforce is making this promise an increasingly difficult one to keep.

The reasons for the nursing shortage are complex and affected by changing demographic trends. Our current 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 quickly meet the huge demand for nurses. The impending health care needs of the baby boom generation make the shortage all the more critical. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that 1.1 million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2012. For the first time, the U.S. Department of Labor has identified registered nursing as the top occupation in terms of job growth through 2012. However, if educational trends for registered nurses remain at current levels, our nation will be 800,000 nurses short by 2012.

In 2002, Congress took an important first step in addressing our nursing shortage by enacting the Nurse Reinvestment Act (P.L. 107-205). This measure expanded and improved Nursing Workforce Development programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration. However, these excellent programs cannot adequately address the growing shortage without additional appropriations. We need prepared nurse faculty to increase our capacity to educate nurses. Last year, an American Association of Colleges of Nursing survey found that 32,797 qualified students were turned away from nurse education programs due to insufficient faculty, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints.

We greatly appreciate the support that your committee has shown nursing in the past. In May 2005, a majority (51) of your colleagues wrote to you in support of this \$175 million funding

request in the attached letter. We hope we can continue to count on your support for these important programs that to help maintain the personal and economic health of our nation.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Health Care Association
American Hospital Association
American Nurses Association
American Organization of Nurse Executives
Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Federation of American Hospitals
Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
National Center for Assisted Living
Premier
VHA Inc.
Visiting Nurse Associations of America