AACN Applauds the Bipartisan Efforts of Congress to Pass FY 2015 Spending Bill

On December 15, 2014, President Obama signed into law a bipartisan fiscal year (FY) 2015 spending package of $1.1 trillion to fund the federal government through the remainder of the fiscal year. This spending bill, commonly referred to as the “CRomnibus,” provides FY 2015 levels for 11 of the 12 appropriations bills, with a separate, short-term CR to fund the Department of Homeland Security through February 27, 2015.

AACN strongly applauds the legislation, which includes $231.622 million (an increase of $7.781 million, or 3.5% over FY 2014) for the Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act), and a total of $30.084 billion (a slight increase over FY 2014) for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Within NIH, $140.953 million is allocated to the National Institute of Nursing Research (an increase of $436,000 over FY 2014). The package also includes additional support to strengthen our nation’s public health infrastructure, including activities to address the Ebola virus. These levels demonstrate Congress’ continued investment in America’s nursing and healthcare workforce and the role of science in strengthening evidence-based practice. For more information on funding levels for specific programs of interest, see AACN’s FY 2015 Appropriations Chart.

The passage of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 (H.R. 83) reflects the bipartisan effort of House as well as Senate appropriators and senior leadership to reach a long-term solution— a timely and critical effort given that prior to its passage, the Continuing Resolution funding the federal government was set to expire at midnight on December 11, 2014. As the final hours of December 11 drew to a close, the House of Representatives remained in deliberation before the vote was presented. Recognizing the importance of the nursing constituent voice, AACN called upon its Grassroots Network (comprised of over 11,000 AACN member deans/directors, faculty, students, and practicing nurses) to urge their Representatives to vote in favor of the bill. In just four hours, Grassroots Network members sent nearly 200 messages to 127 Representatives.

The House passed the bill by a vote of 219 to 206. Upon its passage, House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) stated, “This legislation represents exactly what our constituents sent us to Congress to do in November. It is a bipartisan compromise that makes hard but responsible decisions to govern responsibly and effectively. We worked together across the aisle to find common ground, while advancing policies that will promote job creation, economic growth, fiscal responsibility, and a better future for families and communities across the nation.”

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), a long-time supporter of nursing and higher education funding, noted in her floor statement, “The omnibus bill also protects America’s opportunity ladder by making college more affordable. This bill increases the maximum Pell grant by $100 for a maximum grant of $5,830. That means a student from a family of modest means will be able to buy an extra book or pay an extra lab fee. So if you want to be a nurse or an inhalation therapist or a surgical tech, you have a government on your side to help you get there.”
AACN appreciates the commitment of the House and Senate leadership, Appropriations Committee leadership, and members of the Appropriations Committee for their steadfast commitment to fund the critical federal programs that impact millions of Americans. AACN will continue to work with Congress to impress upon them the importance of these programs and appreciates AACN’s Grassroots Network for their quick response to share the nursing academic voice. For more information on AACN’s FY 2015 Appropriations Advocacy, visit: http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/appropriations.

**HRSA Announces 2015 Funding Opportunities**

Please see the following information regarding 2015 funding opportunities from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). These programs are available to academic institutions, nursing students, faculty, and practicing nurses. For more information, visit HRSA Loans & Scholarships.

**Funding Opportunities for Schools of Nursing**

The Nurse Anesthetist Traineeship (NAT) Program cycle is now accepting applications. The NAT Program awards funds to eligible institutions to pay full or partial costs of tuitions, books, and educational fees of licensed registered nurses enrolled as full-time students in an anesthesia program. Applications are due February 26, 2015. For a complete list of criteria and more information on the NAT Program, visit: http://www.grants.gov/view-opportunity.html?oppId=270393.

The Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) application cycle is now open. This program provides funding to establish and operate geriatric education centers that will implement the GWEP project to “develop a health care workforce that maximizes patient and family engagement and improves health outcomes for older adults by integrating geriatrics with primary care.” Emphasis will be placed on providing the primary care workforce with the knowledge and skill sets to care for the elderly and on community partner collaboration. Applications are due in full by March 5, 2015. For more information and how to apply for the GWEP, visit: http://www.grants.gov/view-opportunity.html?oppId=270450.

**Funding Opportunities for Students**

The NURSE Corps Scholarship Program application cycle is scheduled to open in March or April of 2015. The Scholarship Program offers funding for students accepted or enrolled in entry-level or graduate nursing programs in exchange for working in a Critical Shortage Facility upon graduation for at least two years. For more information about the NURSE Corps Scholarship Program, visit: http://www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/scholarships/nursing/.

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Scholarship Program application will open in March or April of 2015. The Scholarship Program offers funding for tuition, fees, other educational costs, and provides a living stipend in exchange for agreeing to serve for at least two years in an approved outpatient facility within a medically underserved community. For more information, visit: http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/scholarships/index.html.

**Funding Opportunities for Practicing Nurses and Faculty**

The NURSE Corps Loan Repayment Program (LRP) application will open on January 13, 2015. The LRP offers Registered Nurses and certain Advanced Practice Registered Nurses an opportunity to have up to 60 percent of their outstanding qualifying educational loans paid off in exchange for a two-year service commitment at a Critical Shortage Facility, and an additional 25 percent for an optional third year. For more information and a list of criteria for the LRP, visit: http://www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/repayment/nursing/index.html.

The National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment program application will open in January 2015. This program is open to licensed primary care, dental, and mental and behavior health providers who are currently employed or have accepted an employment offer NHSC-approved site. Awardees will receive loan repayment in exchange for working in a Health Professional Shortage Area. For more information, visit: http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loanrepayment/.
HRSA Releases Brief on Nursing Workforce Projections

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) recently released a new brief titled The Future of the Nursing Workforce: National- and State-Level Projections, 2012-2025.

According to the HRSA, the brief “presents projections on the supply and demand of registered nurses and licensed practical/vocational nurses for the U.S. in 2025. State-level differences in demographics and the labor market will result in considerable variation in the size and adequacy of the nursing workforce across the country.”

For more information, visit: http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/supplydemand/nursing/workforceprojections/index.html.

AACN’s Advocacy Voice in 2014: The Year in Review

Through the guidance of AACN’s Government Affairs Committee (GAC), the government affairs staff spearheaded its work based on the priorities set forth in AACN’s 2014 Federal Policy Agenda. GAC Chair Dr. Anita Hufft, Dean of Texas Woman’s University, convened the 10-member committee to provide direction and thoughtful consideration on proposed legislation, communications with federal departments and agencies, and how to best integrate nursing education’s voice in national dialogues on the changing healthcare delivery system.

As 2014 draws to a close, AACN would like to thank its many committed advocacy partners for their efforts to promote the association’s policy priorities surrounding nursing education, research, and practice over the past year.

AACN’s State Grassroots Liaisons (SGLs) ensured that fellow AACN members within their states responded to timely Action Alerts. SGLs secured visits with federal legislative offices during Spring and Fall meetings for deans in their state, and have fostered strong relationships with members of Congress and their staff. Through quarterly calls and biannual meetings, these committed AACN volunteers served as resources to the staff on multiple policy issues. There are currently 86 SGLs in the program.

AACN’s Grassroots Network members were a vital component of the association’s efforts in communicating to Congress on the necessity of federal programs and legislation impacting the profession and the nation’s health. AACN appreciates members who amplified AACN’s voice by participating in seven Action Alerts to send messages to federal legislators. There are currently 11,950 members in the Grassroots Network.

AACN’s University Government Relations Collaborative (UGRC) convened over 50 government relations representatives from AACN member schools. This collaborative met quarterly to discuss AACN’s policy priorities and strengthen unified messaging. These members provided staff with critical insights on issues relevant to their institutions.

The association looks forward to advancing these priorities in the new year as the 114th Congress convenes on Capitol Hill, and would like to share with you an overview of the major policy and advocacy initiatives that were addressed in 2014.

Appropriations Advocacy
For Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, AACN and the Nursing Community (a coalition of 61 national professional nursing organizations, of which AACN is a member) requested $251 million for the Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act). These programs received $231.622 million in the final FY 2015 spending bill (an increase of 3.5% over FY 2014). AACN’s request for the National Institute of Nursing Research was $150 million. The Institute received a final level of $140.953 (a slight increase over FY 2014).
Looking Ahead in 2015
AACN will continue to educate federal legislators on how these programs impact nurses and patients in their states. Given the uncertain fiscal climate, it will be imperative that AACN members continue to communicate with Congress to ensure they are supported in future fiscal years.

For more information on final FY 2015 spending levels, see article “AACN Commends Congress’s Passage of FY 2015 Spending Bill.”

Nursing Education
Recognizing the need for practicing nurses and nurse faculty, AACN supported programs that create a more highly-educated nursing and health professions workforce. AACN, along with the Nursing Community coalition and the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition, directed their efforts towards ensuring funding for these programs is secured. In addition, AACN provided the nursing lens to higher education issues and worked interprofessionally with the Federation of Association of Schools of the Health Professions to outline principles that will drive the coalition’s advocacy efforts in upcoming higher education reform.

Looking Ahead to 2015
The Higher Education Act is pending reauthorization in 2015. AACN will weigh in on issues impacting our schools, faculty, and students, including distance education regulations, workforce programs, and federal student loans.

Nursing Research
In 2014, AACN became a member of the Rally for Medical Research coalition, and participated in the Rally for Medical Research Capitol Hill Day. Over 300 organizations came together to present a unified voice in support of improving federal funding for healthcare research. AACN educated legislators on how nursing and healthcare research provides innovative and evidence-based solutions, and how these findings are translated to reduce costly illnesses. AACN’s support was broad and far-reaching, and included the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Department of Veteran Affairs, and the Department of Defense. For more information, including supported legislation, see AACN Supported Legislation.

Looking Ahead to 2015
AACN will continue to work with its partners in the healthcare research community to ensure these federal programs thrive. Education on how nursing research improves health promotion, disease prevention, and patient empowerment will be instrumental in helping legislators understand how nursing science contributes to the larger national research agenda.

APRN Practice
AACN, along with its colleagues representing the Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) community, supported eight pieces of legislation that propose to remove barriers that hinder APRNs from practicing to the full extent of their education and training. AACN impressed upon legislators that these barriers prevent the timely delivery of high-quality care, particularly in rural and underserved regions. Additionally, AACN made over 50 Congressional visits in support of the Veterans Health Administration’s proposal to allow full practice authority for APRNs within VA healthcare facilities. For a comprehensive list of supported legislation, see AACN APRN Advocacy.

Looking Ahead in 2015
It is reported that the VHA will release an Interim Final Rule on their proposal to recognize APRNs as full practice providers within VHA facilities. If implemented, this would be a monumental step toward ensuring Veterans have access to care. AACN will continue to collaborate with the APRN community and will call upon its membership for a swift response when the rule is released for public comment.
535 Project: Congressional Connection
In March of this year, AACN embarked on a mission to engage in meaningful conversations with all 535 Congressional offices. To date, 100% of Senate offices and 68% of House offices connected with AACN members and staff through in-person visits, email communications, or via phone. The 535 Project encourages AACN members to educate their legislators about nursing education, research, and practice.

Looking Ahead in 2015
AACN members and staff will aim to reach 100% of House offices and continue fostering working relationships with Members of Congress and their legislative staff.

AACN Wishes You a Happy and Health Holiday Season.
See you in 2015!