

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Services, and Education
Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Services, and Education
Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

Considering the enormity of our nation's ongoing nursing and nurse faculty shortages, we respectfully request that the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs receive \$200 million in appropriations for FY 2009. Current funding levels for Title VIII fail to meet the growing need for registered nurses, and the \$46.2 million cut proposed in the President's FY 2009 budget would endanger an already stressed nursing workforce.

For ten years, the nursing shortage has directly and negatively impacted the United States healthcare delivery system. As a result, the quality and safety of patient care has been jeopardized. The Joint Commission found that for roughly a quarter (24%) of hospital patient deaths and injuries, low nurse staffing levels was a contributing factor. In order to reverse this harmful trend in our healthcare system, more nurses must be educated to practice in areas with a critical need. However, a parallel shortage of nurse faculty has inhibited nursing workforce expansion. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 42,866 qualified applicants were turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing schools in 2006 primarily due to a shortage of nurse faculty. Without more faculty, the ability to educate the next generation of nurses will become an impossible endeavor, resonating in all aspects of nursing care. The nursing and nurse faculty shortage is a debilitating crisis that warrants a strong fiscal investment by Congress.

Since 1964, Title VIII programs have offered viable solutions to nursing shortages, expanded nursing school programs, increased the number of nurse faculty, and helped ensure nurses were practicing in areas with a critical shortage. However, the programs are sorely underfunded. During previous nursing shortages, Congress has appropriated additional funding to schools of nursing and students to help meet the demand. In FY 1974, Congress gave \$160.61 million to Title VIII. This is the highest level of funding Title VIII has ever been appropriated and is close to the current funding of \$156.05 million. Thirty-four years ago, Congress made a strong commitment to address the nursing shortage of the 1970's. If we are to truly address today's nursing shortage, Congress must take a critical look at how much we are investing in Title VIII programs.

The current fiscal environment makes determining appropriations levels difficult. Yet, Congress must do more to address the nursing workforce crisis. We believe that a \$200 million commitment to Title VIII Nursing Education and Workforce Development programs is a responsible and important investment in the health of all Americans. We look forward to working with you on a bipartisan effort to provide the necessary funding to recruit and retain enough nurses and nurse faculty to meet our nation's current and future health care needs.

Sincerely,





Bert Sanders

Blanche R. Lincoln

Maria Carbone

Ben Card

William

Elizabeth Dole

Paul Boyer

Herb Kohl

Amy Klobuchar

Dick Lugar

Dick Durbin

Byron Dorgan

John Barrasso

Marco Pryor

Mark

Norm Feingold

Ed Johnson

Jim Heala

Debbie Stabenow

Dianne Feinstein

Sam Brownback

Tom Barrasso

Robert Menendez

Frank R. Lautenberg

Jay Rockefeller

John Reed

Chuck Schumer

Barack Obama

Joe Biden

Joe Biden

Carl Levin

Schwarz by Kennedy

Patrick Leahy
Chris Dodd

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Noah Coleman

Joe Lieber

W. V. Roth

Pat Roberts

John Ensign

John Z. Sununu

Bob Casey

Olympia Snowe

J. F. Kennedy

Bob Casey Jr.

John Brown

Kent Conrad

Ken Salazar

Jon Tester

Joe Neuberger