

May 12, 2003

Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Tom Harkin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Harkin:

We are writing to request \$175 million for Title VIII nurse education programs, including programs created under the Nurse Reinvestment Act, in fiscal year 2004 to address the severe nursing shortage our country is facing.

The current nursing shortage is a significant national problem that has a major negative impact on the delivery of quality health care in this country. *A New England Journal of Medicine* study found that nursing shortages in hospitals are associated with a higher risk of complications and even deaths. The demand for nurses already exceeds the supply, and this gap will only grow over the next 20 years. In 2001, the average American hospital vacancy rate was 13 percent for registered nurses. In addition, many older nurses are retiring at the same time the U.S. population is aging and beginning to place additional demands on our health care system.

To address this serious problem, Congress passed the Nurse Reinvestment Act (P.L. 107-205) last year with overwhelming bipartisan support. The Nurse Reinvestment Act provides scholarships to nursing students who agree to provide at least two years of service in a health care facility with a critical nursing shortage. It creates career ladders to help nurses and other health professionals advance in their careers, provides loan cancellation for nurses with advanced degrees in exchange for teaching at a school of nursing, improves nurse retention by promoting nurse involvement in organizational decision-making, and provides specialized training for nurses.

The Nurse Reinvestment Act builds on existing Title VIII nurse education programs that provide loan repayments to nurses, improve the diversity of the nursing workforce, and expand opportunities for nursing education at all levels. All these programs play a vital role in recruiting nurses and making sure they have the training they need to care for patients.

The promise of the Nurse Reinvestment Act and other nurse education programs will not be met unless we invest in these programs this year. We believe that \$175 million for Title VIII nursing education programs is a necessary investment in order to help alleviate the current nursing shortage. This funding request will allow new Nurse Reinvestment Act programs to get underway in communities across the country and will provide additional support for other nurse education programs. We appreciate your attention to this vital national health care problem and look forward to working with you to provide the necessary funding to help recruit and retain more nurses in this country.

Sincerely,
