

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2009

Dear Colleague:

Please join us in signing the attached letter urging the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee to provide \$215 million for the Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act) in FY 2010.

Our country is facing an eleven-year nursing shortage that is projected to continue for at least another decade. Tuition costs of nurse education are rising, and nurse faculty shortages limit the number of students entering nursing schools. Graduates are burdened with student debt while pursuing healthcare fields that are inadequately funded. There is a strong need to strengthen the nursing force as the baby boomer population retires and the need for healthcare expands. As the largest segment of the healthcare workforce, Registered Nurses (RNs) likely will be recruited to fill many of the new positions opening every day. A significant investment in the Title VIII programs will provide the support for nursing education which is the key to rejuvenating the nurse labor force.

The Title VIII programs have been a proven solution to past nursing shortages when provided with adequate funding. These programs support the education of registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, nurse faculty, and nurse researchers. Additionally, they focus on recruitment and retention, two other distinct areas impacting the shortage. However, over the last three years, the combination of relatively flat Title VIII funding, rising educational and administrative costs and inflation, has significantly decreased the programs' purchasing power. Subsequently, the number of grantees supported by the programs has decreased by 43% over the past four years.

In FY 2008, the Health Resources and Services Administration was forced to turn away 92% of the applicants for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program. This important program enables new nursing graduates' entry into health facilities deemed to have a critical shortage – such as departments of public health, community health centers, and disproportionate share hospitals.

The continuing shortage of RNs poses real challenges to our healthcare system and in the longer term to potential healthcare reform plans. Title VIII programs are structured to address the needs of the nursing workforce, but the programs cannot meet this demand without additional funding. Please join us in supporting nurses. If you would like to sign, or if you have any questions, please contact Mona Shah in Senator Mikulski's office at 4-4654 or Mona_Shah@help.senate.gov, or Amy Pellegrino in Senator Snowe's office at 4-8673 or Amy_Pellegrino@snowe.senate.gov.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senator