

**Testimony of the Americans for Nursing Shortage Relief (ANSR) Alliance
Regarding Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriations for
Nursing Workforce Development Programs**

**Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives**

March 31, 2008

The undersigned organizations of the ANSR Alliance greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding fiscal year (FY) 2009 appropriations for Title VIII – Nursing Workforce Development Programs. The ANSR Alliance is comprised of fifty-one national nursing organizations that united in 2001 to identify and promote creative strategies for addressing the nursing and nurse faculty shortages, including passage of the *Nurse Reinvestment Act of 2002*.

The ANSR Alliance stands ready to work with lawmakers to advance programs and policy that will sustain and strengthen our nation’s nursing workforce. To ensure that our nation has a sufficient and adequately prepared nursing workforce to provide quality care to all well into the 21st century, ANSR urges Congress to:

- **Appropriate at least \$200 million in funding for Nursing Workforce Development Programs under Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in FY 2009.**
- **Restore the Advanced Education Nursing program (Sec. 811) and fund it at a level on par with the proposed FY 2009 increase for the other Title VIII programs.**

The Nursing Shortage

Nursing is one of the largest health care professions with an estimated 2.9 million licensed RNs in the United States.¹ Nurses work in a variety of settings, including public health, long-term care, and hospitals. Advanced practice nurses (nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, clinical nurse specialists, and certified registered nurse anesthetists) practice in numerous settings, including primary care, hospitals, and surgical care facilities. Approximately three out of five jobs are in hospitals.² A federal report published in 2004 estimates that by 2020 the national nurse shortage will increase to more than 1 million full-time nurse positions. According to these projections, which are based on the current rate of nurses entering the profession, only 64 percent of projected demand will be met.³ A

¹Steiger, D.M., Bausch, S., Johnson, B., Peterson, A. (2006) *The Registered Nurse Population: Findings from the March 2004 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses*. Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-2007 Edition*, Registered Nurses.

³ Health Resources and Services Administration. (2004) *What is Behind HRSA's Projected Supply, Demand, and Shortage of Registered Nurses?*

2007 study that uses different assumptions published in *Health Affairs* has adjusted the demand projection to 340,000 nurses by 2020.⁴ In either scenario, the shortage presents an extremely serious challenge to health care access and quality patient care. Even considering only the smaller projection of vacancies, this shortage still results in a frightening gap in nursing service, essentially three times the 2001 nursing shortage.

The Desperate Need for Nurse Faculty

Nursing vacancies exist throughout the entire health care system, including long-term care, home care, and public health. Even the Department of Veterans Affairs, the largest sole employer of RNs in the U.S., has a nursing vacancy rate of 10 percent. In 2005, the American Hospital Association reported that hospitals needed 118,000 more RNs to fill immediate vacancies, and that this 8.5 percent vacancy rate is hampering the hospitals' ability to provide emergency care.⁵ Government estimates indicate that this situation only promises to worsen due to an insufficient supply of individuals matriculating in nursing schools, an aging existing workforce, and the inadequate availability of nursing faculty to educate and train the next generation of nurses. At the exact same time that the nursing shortage is expected to worsen, the baby boom generation is aging and the number of individuals with serious, life-threatening, and chronic conditions requiring nursing care will increase. Consequently, more must be done today by the government to help ensure an adequate nursing workforce for the patients of today and tomorrow.

A particular focus on securing and retaining adequate numbers of faculty is essential to ensure that all individuals interested in – and qualified for – nursing school can matriculate in the year they are accepted. In the 2005-2006 academic year, research reported by the National League for Nursing found that schools of nursing rejected more than 88,000 qualified applications because of shortages of faculty, classroom space, and clinical placement for students.⁶ Aside from having a limited number of faculty, nursing programs struggle to provide space for clinical laboratories and to secure a sufficient number of clinical training sites at health care facilities.

The current and deepening nurse faculty shortfall is a critical reason that the Advanced Education Nursing line item in the Title VIII programs must be fully funded. This program supported 13,877 graduate nursing students in FY 2006. The students that are supported by this funding are the pool of future faculty for the nursing profession. Whether supporting students in clinical education or as faculty in schools of nursing, it is essential that advanced education nursing funding be restored.

The Nursing Supply Impacts America's Emergency Preparedness

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis at HRSA's Bureau of Health Professions reports that the nursing shortage makes it challenging for the health care sector to meet current service needs. Nursing shortfalls exacerbating capacity insufficiencies throughout the health care system have ripple effects, for example, seen in the problems encountered by most communities' day-to-day emergency care services. Facing a pandemic flu or other natural or man-made disaster of significant

⁴ Auerbach, D.I, Buerhaus, P.I., & Staiger, D.O. (2007). Better late than never: Workforce supply implications of later entry into nursing. *Health Affairs*. 26(1): 178-185

⁵ American Hospital Association. (2005). Prepared to Care: The 24/7 Role of America's Full-service Hospitals.

⁶ National League for Nursing. (2008). *Nursing Data Review Academic Year 2005-06*, Executive Summary.

proportions makes the nursing shortage an even greater national concern, as well as an essential part of national preparedness and response planning

Nurses play a critical role as front-line, first-responders. When word of the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita reached nurses across the country, they immediately volunteered in American Red Cross shelters, medical clinics, and hospitals throughout that widespread region. Nurses and advanced practice registered nurses (e.g., nurse midwives, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and certified registered nurse anesthetists) are particularly critical national resources in an emergency, able to provide clinical nursing care as well as primary care. During Katrina and Rita, nurse midwives delivered babies in airplane hangars, and nurses trained in geriatric care assisted in caring for those traumatized by their evacuation from the comforts of their homes, assisted living facilities, or nursing homes. Nurse practitioners diligently staffed temporary and permanent health care clinics to provide needed primary care to hurricane victims. Many nurses contributed not just through their clinical expertise, but also by offering psychological support as they listened to survivors recount their stories of pain and tragedy.

These stories seem particularly relevant in demonstrating the essential assistance nurses provide during tragedies, and reinforce the need to ensure an adequate supply of all types of nurses. Unless steps are taken now, the nation's ability to respond to disasters will be further hindered by the growing nursing shortage. An investment in the nursing workforce is a reasonable and cost-effective investment toward rebuilding the public health infrastructure and increasing our nation's health care readiness and emergency response capabilities.

The Funding Reality

Enacted in 2002, the *Nurse Reinvestment Act* (P.L. 107-205) addressed new and expanded initiatives, including loan forgiveness, scholarships, career ladder opportunities, and public service announcements to advance nursing as a career. Despite the enactment of this critical measure, HRSA fails to have the resources necessary to meet the current and growing demands for our nation's nursing workforce. The President's proposed budget for FY 2009 reduces overall funding of Title VIII by \$46.1 million dollars, a 30% decrease compared to FY 2008. This cut is achieved by zeroing out funding for "Advanced Education Nursing." This funding cut, if implemented, will further diminish training and potentially jeopardizes the delivery of health care. Funding of all of the Title VIII programs make a difference. For example:

- **FY 2006 Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program:** Of the 4,222 applicants, 615 awards were made. This translates to 14.6 percent of applicants receiving awards.
- **FY 2007 Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program:** Whereas last fiscal year, only 12 percent of the 4,845 nursing student applications reviewed were awarded loans in this program (i.e., 586 applicant awards).

The ANSR Alliance requests that the Subcommittee provide a minimum of \$200 million in FY 2009 to fund the Title VIII – Nursing Workforce Development Programs. We also urge the restoration of the Advanced Education Nursing program (Sec. 811) funded at a level on par with the proposed FY 2009 increase for the other Title VIII programs.

This funding can be used to restore the Advanced Education Nursing program and fund a higher rate of Nurse Education Loan Repayment and Nursing Scholarship applications, as well as implement other essential endeavors to sustain and boost our nation's nursing workforce. We thank you for considering our request.

Summary

Programmatic Area	Final FY 2008	President's Budget FY 2009	ANSR Alliance FY 2009 Request
Title VIII - Nursing Workforce Development Programs at HRSA	\$156,046,000	\$109,853,000	\$200,000,000

Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses
 American Academy of Ambulatory Care
 Nursing
 American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
 American Association of Critical-Care Nurses
 American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
 American Association of Nurse Assessment
 Coordinators
 American Association of Nurse Executives
 American Association of Occupational Health
 Nurses, Inc.
 American College of Nurse Practitioners
 American Society of Plastic Surgical Nurses
 Association of periOperative Registered Nurses
 Association of Rehabilitation Nurses
 Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and
 Neonatal Nurses
 Emergency Nurses Association
 Infusion Nurses Society
 International Society of Nurses in Genetics
 National Association of Clinical Nurse
 Specialists

National Association of Neonatal Nurses
 National Association of Nurse Massage
 Therapists
 National Association of Nurse Practitioners in
 Women's Health
 National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses
 National Association of Pediatric Nurse
 Practitioners
 National Association of Registered Nurse First
 Assistants
 National Black Nurses Association
 National Council of State Boards of Nursing
 National League for Nursing
 National Organization for Associate Degree
 Nursing
 National Student Nurses' Association
 Oncology Nursing Society
 RN First Assistants Policy & Advocacy
 Coalition
 Society of Trauma Nurses
 Society of Urologic Nurses and Associates

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