



July 9, 2007

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

The National League for Nursing (NLN) supports your leadership and offers its endorsement in principle of the amendment you are planning to introduce to establish the Troops to Nurse Teachers Program (TNT). Today's shortage of appropriately prepared nurses is deepening poor quality of health care outcomes in the nation's civilian and military sectors. Your amendment wisely proposes to promote health care capacity building through nursing education.

Compounding the nurse shortage are the nursing education programs in every state that must turn away qualified applicants owing in large measure to the lack of nursing faculty. The NLN reported in its *Nurse Educators 2006: A Report of the Faculty Census Survey of RN and Graduate Programs* that the nurse faculty vacancies in the United States continued to grow with a 7.9 percent vacancy rate of budgeted, unfilled, full-time positions in baccalaureate and higher degree programs – an increase of 32 percent since 2002; and a 5.6 percent vacancy rate in associate degree programs, which translates to a 10 percent rise in the same period. Faculty are the engine of the nursing workforce pipeline, without whom the shortage cannot be resolved.

TNT could help ease this alarming trend by offering military nurses, who are qualified to teach, fellowships and transitional assistance to become full-time nurse educators at accredited schools of nursing. TNT also would provide a scholarship fund for separating service members who aspire to the nursing professorate. Scaling-up nursing education with TNT Program incentives is a promising rapid intervention strategy to help alleviate the critical need for nurse faculty and, ultimately, for registered nurses who provide quality care to our Armed Forces.

Although the NLN endorses the TNT Program in principle, we would be remiss were we not to bring to your attention the concern we have regarding one of the provisions. Specifically, we ask that you reconsider requirement (f)(2)(C) that benefits retired nurse officers who accept appointments only as “a full-time faculty member of an accredited four-year institution of higher education.” Please note that eligibility for professional registered nurse (RN) licensure can be gained not only from four-year baccalaureate degree (BS) programs, but also from nursing education programs that offer the associate degree (AD) or the diploma.

Moreover, AD RNs educated at two-year colleges, are the largest contingent in the nation's pipeline of RN professionals, accounting for 60 percent of all new registered nurses. Compared to their BS RN counterparts, AD RN graduates are more diverse ethnically, racially, and by age. They are less likely to have the economic means, mobility, and time to pursue a RN degree from a four-year program. AD RN graduates also have a greater likelihood of seeking employment close to where they have been educated, which is critical for areas concerned with population retention and regional economic development, such as rural areas where it is difficult to recruit professional staff. As a consequence, NLN respectfully requests that you consider modifying the amendment's (f)(2)(C) requirement to “serves as a full-time faculty member of an accredited nursing education program.”

The NLN is the sole organization representing leaders in nursing education and nurse faculty across all types of nursing programs in the United States. With more than 1,100 nursing schools and health care agencies, some 21,000 individual members comprising nurses, educators, administrators, public members, and 18 constituent leagues, the NLN is the premier organization dedicated to excellence in nursing education that prepares the nursing workforce to meet the needs of our diverse populations in an ever-changing health care environment. We commend your forward-looking leadership in addressing the nurse educator shortage and take pride in your commitment to provide educational opportunities for the men and women who dare to care as America's nurses. If we can be of any assistance to you in the passage of this amendment, please feel free to contact Kathleen Ream, the NLN's Government Affairs Director, at 703-241-3974.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beverly Malone", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Beverly Malone, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chief Executive Officer