



May 5, 2009

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Mikulski:

The National League for Nursing (NLN) appreciates your strategic effort to integrate Title VIII – Nursing Workforce Development Programs into health care reform legislation. Connecting health care workforce issues within an overall transformation of the nation’s health system leverages the essential role that our nation’s workforce will play in delivering access to care, improving measurable health outcomes, and potentially lowering health care costs for everyone in our nation. Realizing a cost-effective health model of coordinated care, health promotion, and consumer education and empowerment will require effective learning from well-prepared nurses, the health system’s frontline profession that relies on educating patients and communities, and is guided by a holistic philosophy of care.

Most critically, narrowing the nation’s costly health care inequalities gap will turn on the nurse workforce, which the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports is predominant among professional and related occupations in the health care industry. As nurse educator-scholars, the NLN’s membership is committed to promoting evidence-based policy strategies for health care and capacity-building. To that end the NLN offers our research to reinforce the Title VIII authority, including the statute’s ramifications for delivering optimal health for all via a health care system that assures access to comprehensive, culturally competent, quality care.

Our nation is enriched by cultural complexity where 34 percent of our population identifies as racial and ethnic minorities. Yet ethnic/cultural/gender diversity eludes the nurse and nurse educator workforce. The NLN annual survey of all nursing schools for the 2006-2007 academic year reported minorities at 23.6 percent of the nursing undergraduates. The nursing programs offering an associate degree and diploma toward licensure as a registered nurse (RN) graduate a disproportionate share of the nursing undergraduates who are minorities, at nearly twice the number of minorities graduating from baccalaureate-based education programs.

It is important to note that in 2006-2007 the associate degree (ADN) students continued to comprise the majority of prelicensure admissions (61.8 percent) and nursing graduations (60.2 percent). This trend is relevant not only to the characteristics of the future RN labor supply, but also to the future nurse educator workforce, underscoring the exigency of expanding opportunities for academic progression to nurses of all educational backgrounds. ADN enrollments historically strengthen during economic downturns. The 2007 survey results support that finding with the greatest increase in annual admissions to nursing education in ADN programs, which admitted 12.3 percent more new students than last year.

Besides representing an untapped talent to remedy the nationwide nursing shortage, race- and ethnic-diverse minorities in nursing are essential to developing a health care system that understands and addresses the needs of our rapidly diversifying population. Workforce diversity is especially needed where research indicates that factors such as biases and stereotyping, communication barriers, limited cultural sensitivity and competence, and system and organizational determinants contribute to health care disparities. Retaining and refining Title VIII evidence-based policy strategies that build on inclusion and advancement of the entire nurse workforce, such as the statute's Section 821: Workforce Diversity Grants and Section 835-836: Nursing Student Loan Program, promise to be efficacious, cost-effective means for promoting health equity provisions in health care reform legislation.

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 1,200 nursing schools and health care agencies, some 30,000 individual members comprising nurses, educators, administrators, public members, and 21 constituent leagues, the NLN is the premier organization dedicated to excellence in nursing education that prepares the nursing workforce to meet the needs of the nation's diverse populations in an ever-changing health care environment.

The National League for Nursing's annual Nursing Data Review Academic Year casts a wide lens on all types of nursing programs, from doctoral through diploma including the 1000-plus programs offering diploma and associate nursing degrees, to determine rates of application, enrollment and graduation. Administered from March to September 2008 to obtain 2006-2007 data, the review also provides a comprehensive demographic profile of the current student population, documenting ethnic-racial identity, gender, and age. This data can be accessed by going to NLN DataView at <http://www.nln.org/research/slides/index.htm>.

If we can be of any assistance to you during your deliberations on health care reform, please feel free to contact me or 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