

Supporters of Loan Forgiveness for Services in Areas of National Need

March 4, 2008

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy and Ranking Member Enzi:

The undersigned organizations applaud your work to fully reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) for the first time since 1998. As Congress moves to reconcile the two HEA bills, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137) and the Higher Education Amendments (S. 1642), we strongly urge you to adopt the House provisions on the new Loan Forgiveness for Services in Areas of National Need.

This vital new loan forgiveness program will provide assistance to individuals choosing to go into professions experiencing a national shortage of providers. Young graduates' career paths and choices upon completion of their college and university training are influenced by student loan debt. Federal programs that offer support to such graduates are essential to retain the current workforce and recruit new professionals to accommodate the impending demand for their specialized skills, services and talents.

Among the professions eligible for the new program are:

- **Primary care dentists and faculty** at academic dental institutions play a critical role in addressing access to dental care and improving the oral health in the U.S. Public health, general and pediatric dentists are the heart of the primary care team. Currently, there are more than 400 dental school faculty vacancies. Before entering dental residency training the average debt upon graduation from U.S. dental schools in 2007 was \$156,810.
- **Medical Specialists** are in short supply and face added financial hardship due to their long residency training periods, which can require 8 years or more. During that time, medical residents receive a relatively small annual training stipend, but face debt loads of over \$140,000. This new program would help address this hardship for medical residents in training programs greater than 5 years in duration that receive fewer applications than available nationwide positions.
- **Nurses** whose shortage is well documented and acknowledged across the country. The shortage is expected to intensify as baby boomers age and the need for health care grows. Compounding the problem is the fact that nursing colleges and universities across the country are struggling to expand enrollment levels.¹
- **Podiatrists** are in high demand to care for an increasingly needy population including the aged, diabetic and obese. The 2006 U.S. Health Workforce Profile prepared for the Health Resources and Services Administration reports that the number of podiatrists in the nation is shrinking. There are only 6 podiatrists for every 100,000 Americans, compared with 214 allopathic physicians and 59 dentists. Podiatrists face similar educational financial challenges to physicians and dentists.
- **Public health professionals** who fulfill responsibilities to protect, improve and coordinate the physical, oral and mental health needs of individuals and society.
- **First responders**, including police and firefighters. Many law enforcement agencies across the country cite retention as a top concern and their shortage as contributing to slower emergency-

¹ Nursing Shortage, American Association of Colleges of Nursing October 2007.
<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/FactSheets/NursingShortage.htm>

response times and backlogs in criminal cases². Additionally two-thirds of all fire departments operate with inadequate staffing. Incidences of firefighter deaths due to a lack of back-up have been seen around the country.

- **Mental health professionals** address a variety of health care needs including focusing on changing behaviors among children and youth who are violent or accident prone, among persons who engage in smoking, substance abuse, or risky sexual behavior, as well as older adults who need help with medication compliance. There is a particular shortage of mental health professionals who specialize in the needs of children/youth and older adults—the two most vulnerable populations³.
- **Audiologists** specialize in the assessment, treatment, rehabilitation of hearing loss, central auditory processing and balance disorders in patients of all ages. Audiologists are facing shortages in healthcare and educational settings. Contributing to this shortage are the increased number of infants and young children being identified through state mandated Early Hearing Detection and Intervention programs and the increased number of older adults who find themselves in need of audiologic services. Further, federal legislative mandates stipulate the need for audiologic services in the public schools.
- **Dietitians are nutrition professionals** whose skills are essential in optimizing patient outcomes, particularly for older populations with increased incidences of diseases from diabetes to high blood pressure.
- **Social workers** are instrumental in coordinating services for all Americans, particularly vulnerable populations including children and older adults. A recent study⁴ warns of an impending shortage of social workers.
- **School psychologists** are in critical shortage according to the National Association of School Psychologists. The shortage is complicated by the fact that more than half of school psychologists are expected to retire by 2015. Similar shortages exist for school counselors and social workers.⁵
- **Speech language pathologists** (SLPs) evaluate and treat individuals with communication and swallowing disabilities resulting from intellectual disabilities, neurological conditions, or genetic or medical conditions across the age spectrum. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) face a growing shortage in education and health care settings due to baby boom retirements in combination with a growing 13-and-under and 65-and-older population who are key consumers of SLP services.
- **School counselors** provide students with access to a counselor. They are uniquely qualified to collaborate with teachers and administrators to provide training as well as to identify and address problems among students who have faced crisis at home, in their communities and at school.
- **Foreign language specialists** are in short supply in the U.S. Army⁶. The Army doesn't have enough linguists to translate intercepts and interrogate suspects. The Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency have chronic problems in trying to recruit capable speakers of Arabic, Turkic, Indic and Iranian dialects. Three in ten State Department personnel serving overseas in language-sensitive positions lack adequate proficiency in local languages, and in places where Arabic or Chinese are spoken, the number rises to four in ten. Over half of the State Department personnel holding language sensitive positions in Baghdad, Cairo, and Kabul do not have adequate proficiency.

² Calling All Future Police Officers, A shortage of recruits has law-enforcement agencies across the U.S. scrambling to fill the ranks, by Kris Axtman, *Staff writer, The Christian Science Monitor*, January 23, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0123/p03s02-ussc.html>

³ A Critical Need for Mental Health Workforce Training, American Psychological Association, http://www.apa.org/ppo/education/samhsa_critical.html

⁴ Assuring the Sufficiency of a Frontline Workforce: A National Study of Licensed Social Workers, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), <http://workforce.socialworkers.org/>

⁵ Supporting Student Success: Remediating the Shortage of School Psychologists, National Association of School Psychologists, <http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/personnelshortages.pdf>

⁶ Hear No Evil: Closing the Gap in National Security Language Resources, Lexington Institute, January 2007, <http://lexingtoninstitute.org/docs/linguistics.pdf>

- **Librarians** currently have more than 3 in 5 age 45 and older. Many will retire in the next 10 years. Approximately 25 percent of America's school libraries do not have a state certified school library media specialist on staff.
- **Public defenders** are in short supply. Corrections officials have cited the unfairness and the cost of keeping suspects in jail for years waiting for a trial because of a shortage of public defenders. Judges have pointed to growing caseloads with no growth in public defender budgets while legislators have complained of delays and dismissals due to overloaded public defender agencies.

Our organizations are deeply grateful for the work of the House Committee on Education and Labor and Senate Committee Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions has done to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. We now urge you to complete the reauthorization and adopt the House provisions on the Loan Forgiveness for Services in Areas of National Need.

On behalf of the

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 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
 American Association of Colleges of Nursing
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 American Association of Public Health Dentistry
 American Counseling Association
 American Dental Association
 American Dental Education Association
 American Nurses Association
 American Podiatric Medical Association
 American Psychological Association
 American Public Health Association
 American School Counselor Association
 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
 American Student Association of Community Colleges
 American Student Dental Association
 Association of Academic Health Centers
 Association of American Medical Colleges
 Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions
 Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
 Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing
 Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors
 Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service
 Council for Opportunity in Education
 Council on Social Work Education
 National Association of School Psychologists
 National Association of Social Workers
 National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs
 National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
 National League for Nursing
 School Social Work Association of America

Supporters of Loan Forgiveness for Services in Areas of National Need

March 4, 2008

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon:

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