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For Immediate Release:

ELIMINATION OF TRAINING PROGRAMS IN PRESIDENT'S BUDGET THREATENS HEALTH CARE ACCESS FOR NATION'S MOST VULNERABLE

Washington, D.C., February 7, 2006 – The Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC) today warned that President Bush's proposal to eliminate nearly all funding for Title VII health professions programs and freeze funding for Title VIII nurse training programs in FY 2007 decimates the nation's efforts to train skilled health professionals. Additionally, the proposed cuts threaten access to quality health care for disadvantaged populations. Without these funds, health professions schools nationwide will be forced to terminate interdisciplinary training and recruitment programs that are essential to maintaining a workforce of well-trained safety net providers.

The president's proposed budget provides funding for only one of the Title VII programs—\$10 million for the Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students program, which received \$47 million last year. The Title VII programs, which were slashed by more than 50 percent in last year's budget, have three essential missions: increasing access to primary care, enhancing health professions diversity, and improving the geographic distribution of providers. Providers trained under the Title VII and VIII health professions programs are more likely to work in rural and other underserved regions, helping to address the geographic disparities plaguing the healthcare workforce.

Additionally, these are the only federal programs specifically designed to recruit and train minority and disadvantaged students to join the health professions. "Without funding for these programs, many schools will be forced to cease their efforts to recruit and prepare minority students to enter the workforce. Numerous studies show that a more diverse workforce enhances the quality of care for all Americans," stated Louis W. Sullivan, M.D., former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services and President Emeritus of Morehouse School of Medicine.

Despite the continued, documented shortage of nurses in various health care facilities across the country, the president's budget freezes funding for the Title VIII nurse training programs. The nursing shortage will only worsen without the additional investment into these programs designed to bolster the nursing workforce's stability.

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In light of the Bush administration's stated commitment to develop a health professions workforce for the 21st century, HPNEC questions how it can eliminate the very programs designed to educate and train professionals who can best meet the nation's ever-evolving health care needs. HPNEC recommends that Congress provide \$550 million for the Title VII and VIII health professions and nursing programs in FY 2007.

The Title VII and VIII health professions and nursing education programs, administered by the Bureau of Health Professions within the Health Resources and Services Administration, support the training and education of quality health professionals through loans, loan guarantees, and scholarships to students, and through grants and contracts to academic institutions and non-profit organizations.

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The Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC) is an alliance of more than 50 national organizations representing schools, programs, health professionals, and students dedicated to ensuring the health care workforce is well-trained to meet the needs of the nation's diverse population. For more information, visit <http://www.aamc.org/advocacy/hpniec/>.