

March 19, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Reid:

As you and your colleagues work to finalize health reform legislation, the undersigned members of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP) seek clarification of a provision in Sec. 5307 of H.R. 3590 that directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to evaluate health professions curricula. Created in 1968 as a forum for representatives from organizations of health professions education, FASHP addresses education's role in organizational matters of health care, encourages effective collaboration among the health professions in education and practice and prepares health professionals for the future.

We appreciate the provisions in Sec. 5307 of H.R. 3590 that authorize grants through Titles VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act for curricular developments in certain areas. Our members recognize the importance of preparing the health professions workforce with skills in cultural competency, prevention, public health, and working with individuals with disabilities, and grants under Titles VII and VIII will facilitate their efforts in these areas. However, we are concerned that the Senate bill directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to "evaluate the adoption and implementation" of curricula and to "facilitate the inclusion of these competency measures in quality measurement systems as appropriate."

Evaluation of health professions curricula is best achieved by the accrediting bodies, which serve as the most qualified authorities to assess curricular standards for health professions programs. Through the accreditation process, each health professions education program is required to adhere to national standards for structure, function, and performance, but also is allowed the necessary flexibility to design a program that most appropriately meets its mission and the needs of the community it serves. The provision in Sec. 5307 of the Senate bill sets a troubling precedent that would seemingly redirect this authority to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, a political appointee.

We urge you to clarify that the provision in Sec. 5307 will not supersede the authority or expertise of the accrediting bodies. This clarification will strengthen the ability of the programs to improve patient care consistent with the goals outlined in Sec. 5307, will enable programs to adapt to emerging and evolving needs, and will shield health professions curricula from politically motivated mandates.

We appreciate the opportunity to continue working with you on this matter, and we thank you for your continued commitment to crafting policies that meet our mutual goal of improving the nation's health.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Tannaz Rasouli at trasouli@aamc.org or (202) 828-0057 or Pamela Murphy at pmurphy@aacom.org or (301) 968-4151.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine
American Dental Education Association
American Podiatric Medical Association
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions
National League for Nursing