November 29, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid  The Honorable John Boehner
Majority Leader    Speaker
United States Senate    United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC  20510   Washington, DC  20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader    Minority Leader
United States Senate    United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC  20510   Washington, DC  20515

Dear Leader Reid, Speaker Boehner, Leader McConnell and Leader Pelosi:

The undersigned groups agree that sequestration would be devastating to health programs, potentially decreasing the country’s supply of health professionals and limiting patient access to care at a time of growing demand. As Congress considers a balanced approach to deficit reduction to replace the sequester, we urge you to fund the National Health Care Workforce Commission at $3 million; the Commission’s work will inform difficult policy decisions to ensure that resources are channeled optimally, and are not redirected arbitrarily from programs that protect patients’ access to care.

As the United States grapples with a deficit of physicians and other health professionals, the country lacks a comprehensive strategy to address these critical shortages. The National Health Care Workforce Commission was designed as an independent body to study and advise policymakers on a broad range of workforce-related topics, including national workforce priorities and goals, current and projected workforce supply, and assessments of current and needed education and training activities to meet the demand for health care workers. Moreover, the Commission was tasked with analyzing and making recommendations to eliminate barriers surrounding disciplines and professions where demand is not being met, such as shortages of primary care practitioners; pediatric and adult specialists; and mental, dental, and public health professionals. Without an explicit appropriation, the Commission has not been able to identify obstacles that may create and exacerbate workforce shortages and improve coordination on the federal, state and local levels. Yet, in the coming weeks, policy decisions with the potential to profoundly affect the nation’s workforce capacity may be enacted without the benefit of the Commission’s expertise.

This entity has become more critical as more Americans have insurance coverage and the population ages, requiring greater access to care. Guidance from this Commission will also ensure that the training funds are being spent in areas where they can have the greatest impact. Every year that goes by without funding for the Commission means one year longer without its analyses on the scope of and recommendations on how to address the crisis.
While the undersigned organizations are aware of the dire fiscal situation this country faces and that difficult choices must be made to address it, it is critical to preserve the programs that will help this country regain fiscal stability. Across-the-board cuts as mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011 will not achieve this. We urge you to find an alternative that will ensure federal dollars are spent to best address the country’s needs. The National Health Care Workforce Commission will provide Congress with a necessary and comprehensive analysis of workforce issues across disciplines so lawmakers can appropriately assess the difficult choices related to health spending, rather than diverting resources indiscriminately from programs most in need, like those for physician and other health professional training.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Physician Assistants
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American College of Clinical Pharmacy
American College of Nurse Practitioners
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians
American College of Osteopathic Internists
American College of Physicians
American Medical Student Association
American Organization of Nurse Executives
American Osteopathic Association
American Podiatric Medical Association
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association of Academic Health Centers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Chiropractic Colleges
Association of Departments of Family Medicine
Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions
Association of University Programs in Health Administration
National AHEC Organization
National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems
National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties
North American Primary Care Research Group
Physician Assistant Education Association
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine