



The American Association of International Healthcare Recruitment (AAIHR) applauds President Obama's public recognition of the United States' severe nursing shortage at last week's White House Health Summit, as well as his commitment to addressing this important issue in a bipartisan manner. While a comprehensive, long-term solution is the obvious goal, the reality is that the nursing shortage is compromising patient safety **now**, and immediate action is needed to ensure that health care providers are able to adequately staff their facilities.

Therefore, we believe that it is important to recognize the critical role foreign nurses have played in filling the growing number of vacancies in healthcare facilities throughout the country. For years, hospitals and long term care facilities have augmented their nursing staffs with competent, well-trained, U.S.-licensed international nurses. Current visa caps, however, have reduced the number of immigrant nurses over the past several years at a time we need them the most.

We share the President's view that solving this problem requires providing nursing schools with additional faculty and training resources, and we believe that increased federal funding for domestic nurse training and retention is the key to a long-term solution. It is important to note, however, that increased funding will not put nurses by the bedside in the near term. As an immediate short-term and stop-gap measure, the recruitment and placement of international nurses are vital to hospitals' and long term care facilities' ability to operate at full capacity to care for their communities. This issue is really about critical, timely and accessible health care across the board, and foreign-trained nurses are a readily available, reliable and dependable source for the United States and will provide us with the time we need to grow our own without putting patient safety at risk.

Last year, we joined with the American Hospital Association, the American Healthcare Association, and other industry stakeholders in support of bipartisan legislation that would provide both immediate and longer term remedies to the nursing shortage. The Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act of 2008, introduced by Reps. Wexler (D-FL) and Sensenbrenner (R-WI), would allow a limited number of qualified immigrant nurses to quickly fill vacancies in our health care system, while also providing significant funding for domestic nurse training and retention at no expense to the U.S. taxpayer.

We wholeheartedly agree with Rep. Capps' recent statement that "nurses deliver healthcare," and many would share the view that comprehensive healthcare legislation should not be enacted without addressing the nursing shortage first. We believe that the Emergency Nurse Supply Relief Act is a bipartisan, common sense approach to immediately addressing the nursing shortage, while also providing significant domestic nurse education funding at no expense to the U.S. taxpayer.

The legislation would provide up to 20,000 visas per year over a three year period for nurses and physical therapists, allowing healthcare providers to begin filling vacancies within three months of the enactment of the legislation. More importantly, however, the legislation would require sponsoring employers of registered nurses to pay an additional \$1500 fee per visa, which would be used to fund additional capitation grants to U.S. nursing schools, as detailed in Senator Durbin's (D-IL) NEED Act.

While the recently enacted economic stimulus bill includes approximately \$100 million to address the nursing shortage, we believe that providing \$90 million over a three year period in private funding is concrete evidence of the employers' commitment to an increased investment in our nation's nursing schools. The bipartisan legislation we continue to support provides this vital funding.

Karen M. Fleming, President