

June 9, 2014

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on Veterans Affairs
412 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John McCain
United States Senate
241 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Senator McCain,

On behalf of the undersigned nursing organizations, we write to commend your work to advance bipartisan legislation to address the concerns facing our nation's Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). In addition to our professional practice, our members also educate future Registered Nurses (RNs) and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) in VHA facilities across the country. We believe it is imperative that America's Veterans have access to the timely, high-quality, patient-centered, and team-based care they have earned in service to our country. The more than 89,000 members of the nursing workforce (both RNs and APRNs) within the VA play a fundamental role in helping to meet this goal and can help exceed it.

As you consider ways to bolster the healthcare delivery team within VHA facilities, we urge you to support increasing the pipeline of RNs and APRNs. Proposals that would strengthen the National Health Service Corps to meet this demand as well as increased loan repayment and scholarship funding are viable solutions. We also believe that supporting students at the Daniel K. Inouye Graduate School of Nursing within the Uniformed Services University (USU) of the Health Sciences can further accomplish the workforce development that is so urgently needed. The nursing school at USU has a long tradition of preparing highly qualified APRNs ready to meet the needs of our men and women in uniform past and present, with emphasis on the unique challenges of military and Veterans healthcare. Decades of empirical evidence demonstrate that APRNs (including nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse-midwives, and clinical nurse specialists) increase access, improve quality and reduce healthcare costs. In addition to the peer-reviewed literature, the Federal Trade Commissionⁱ, the Institute of Medicineⁱⁱ, the National Governors Associationⁱⁱⁱ and other policy bodies have noted the quality of care APRNs provide and the impact it makes on patients.

At a time when quality, access and high levels of care coordination must be immediately addressed, we urge the VHA to fast track implementation of initiatives designed to increase capacity and improve Veterans access to high-quality healthcare. Among the recommendations Kenneth Kizer, MD, MPH, and Ashish Jha, MD, MPH, made in their *New England Journal of Medicine* article "Restoring Trust in VA Healthcare" on June 4, is ensuring all healthcare providers in the VHA are practicing to the top of their education and skill. This action would immediately bolster the capacity of the existing VHA healthcare workforce, ensure high quality healthcare delivery, and improve the ability of VHA facilities to provide timely access to high

quality care for our Veterans. To further ensure high quality care for our Veterans, initiatives permitting certain Veterans access to the private healthcare sector to expedite care under VHA supervision should also be accompanied by plans to assure timely care coordination among various providers and health systems.

The challenge that lies ahead of Congress and the Administration to address and improve the care provided to America's Veterans is complex and requires thoughtful and prompt action and we applaud your efforts. If our organizations can be of any assistance, please contact Frank Purcell, Senior Director of Federal Government Affairs at the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, at fpurcell@aanadc.com, 202-741-9080; MaryAnne Sapio, Vice President of Federal Government Affairs at the American Association of Nurse Practitioners at msapio@aanp.org, 703-740-2529; or Suzanne Miyamoto, Director of Government Affairs and Health Policy at the American Association of Colleges of Nursing at smiyamoto@aacn.nche.edu, 202-463-6930. Thank you.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Nursing, AAN
American Association of Colleges of Nursing, AACN
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, AANA
American Association of Nurse Practitioners, AANP
American College of Nurse-Midwives, ACNM
American Nurses Association, ANA
Association of Veterans Affairs Nurse Anesthetists, AVANA
Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association, GAPNA
National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists, NACNS
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, NAPNAP
National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties, NONPF
Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health, NPWH

ⁱ Federal Trade Commission (2014, March). *Policy Perspectives: Competition and the Regulation of Advanced Practice Nurses*. Retrieved from <http://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/policy-perspectives-competition-regulation-advanced-practice-nurses/140307aprnpolicypaper.pdf>

ⁱⁱ The Institute of Medicine (2011). *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. The National Academies Press. Washington, DC.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Governors Association. *The Role of Nurse Practitioners in Meeting Increasing Demand for Primary Care*. Retrieved from <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1212NursePractitionersPaper.pdf>