

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We write to respectfully request that any future legislative package, including fiscal year (FY) 2021 appropriations, healthcare extenders or COVID-19 emergency relief, address potentially devastating and sudden funding cuts to the Nation's 120 hospital-based nursing schools. When the United States is battling an ongoing pandemic that has taken the lives of over 290,000 Americans, we recognize more than ever the pivotal role nurses play in responding to public health crises. Congress must work to ensure the nursing pipeline is supported.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States was facing a nursing shortage, but now, many of our hospitals and health systems are especially strained. Nurses are working longer hours, seeing more patients and facing greater risks of illness than usual, highlighting the need for a strong nursing education and training pipeline. There are over a hundred hospital-based nursing schools that contribute to that pipeline, and these schools receive pass-through funding from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This pass-through funding is part of a Medicare Part C funding "pool."

In August 2020, CMS issued a transmittal to Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs), stating that the agency failed to make annual updates to direct graduate medical education (DGME) Part C payments, resulting in overpayments to nursing and allied health education (NAHE) programs. A funding increase for NAHE programs would require a proportional decrease in DGME funding. The agency decided that, in order to correct for these overpayments, MACs should recalculate and recoup payments previously made to NAHE programs, effective September 21, 2020. If no changes are made to current policy, the transmittal would be implemented beginning December 14, 2020.

CMS' effort to recoup these overpayments to hospital-based nursing schools is poorly timed. Hospitals and health systems across the country are struggling to provide care at the height of the worst public health crisis in over a century. Hospital-based nursing schools serve as both employers and educators, and they provide highly trained nurses to many of the communities hit hardest by COVID-19. Failure to act could put these schools at risk of closure or severe cutbacks at a time when we need them most.

It is imperative that we continue to support the Nation's current – and future – nursing workforce. These sudden funding cuts could put our ability to respond to not only COVID-19, but the next pandemic, in jeopardy. We therefore urge you to work together to ensure the future

of hospital-based nursing schools, its employees and graduating nurses, who have done so much for this country.

Sincerely,



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

/s/ Dick Durbin

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez

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Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator