

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol: S-221
Washington, DC 20510

January 5, 2010

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

As diverse nursing and health organizations, we write to join the Home Visiting Coalition, Children's Leadership Council, American Academy of Pediatrics Nemours and numerous other organizations to express our strong support for the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visitation Program (Section 2951) of the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act, which will provide at-risk children and families with meaningful access to quality health, educational and social services that empower them to succeed.

As you know, the home visitation grant program is part of President Obama's bold initiative to expand a broad array of effective home visitation programs that significantly improve the early health, development and educational achievements of infants, children and families, while reducing a host of societal problems, including child abuse, neglect and injuries, poor health outcomes, poor student performance, juvenile delinquency, crime, and welfare dependency, among others. Science highlights the wisdom of investing in evidence-based home visitation. Rigorous evaluations of nurse home visitation show that it improves prenatal health, birth outcomes, child development, school readiness, maternal employment and economic sufficiency, while reducing child abuse, neglect and injuries, mental health problems, juvenile delinquency and crime. Nurse home visitation has been found to save governmental spending in reduced Medicaid and TANF expenditures as well as educational and criminal justice costs. Similarly, home visitation services using social workers, paraprofessionals and other qualified individuals can result in improved health, school readiness, parenting skills, and family stability, leading to children who are ready to learn, thrive and succeed.

We would like to note that the House-passed Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) includes both a home visitation program similar to the grant program in the proposed Senate legislation, and a provision that would simplify, yet not expand, existing Medicaid coverage of nurse home visitation services for first-time low-income children and families. The Medicaid clarification allows States the option of covering Medicaid-eligible nurse home visitation services in a distinct classification, rather than as part of several Medicaid categories which are administratively burdensome to States and health care providers. The Medicaid option, along with the grant program, comprise a comprehensive home visitation program envisioned by President Obama as a cornerstone of an innovative early childhood initiative, allowing States the flexibility to use Medicaid and grant funding to serve a broad array of families and address a myriad of health and health-related needs of children and families.

Our health care system must do more than provide needy children and families with access to health services. We must take affirmative steps that empower them to improve their health and development, leading to holistic improvements in their educational and economic achievements. The grant program with the Medicaid simplification together embody this goal and will reduce health, educational and employment disparities that often plague low-income and at-risk children and families.

The time to invest in a national home visitation program is now. We ask you to strongly support retaining the grant program along with the House-passed Medicaid option for nurse home visitation in the final health reform legislation.

Sincerely,

Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Academy of Nursing
American Nurses Association
American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing
CityMatCH
First Focus Campaign for Children
March of Dimes

National Association of County & City Health Officials
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Association of Neonatal Nurses
National Association of Neonatal Nurse Practitioners
National League for Nursing
National Nursing Centers Consortium
National Nursing Centers Consortium Philadelphia
Nurse-Family Partnership
Nurses for Newborns Foundation
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Public/Private Ventures
Service Employees International Union
The First Five Years Fund
Visiting Nurse Associations of America