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*Submitted for the Record to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and*

*Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies –*

*Addressing the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)*

As president and past president of the National Association for Geriatric Education (NAGE), we are pleased to submit this statement for the record recommending at least **$51 million in Fiscal Year 2018 to support geriatrics programs** under the ***Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP)*** administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). We thank you for your past support and hope our testimony provides ample justification to continue this critical workforce program despite the recommendation that the program be eliminated.

The aging of the US population is well documented and celebrated across all racial and ethnic populations. Our current 47.8 million adults 65 and over represents an increase of 30% in just 10 years (2005) with projections of 98 million older adults in 2060. Importantly, aging is also occurring within older Americans; the 85+ population which is currently 6.7 million, will more than double to 14.6 million in 2040. As age increases, we know risk for dementia increases and older adults may need more assistance from family or paid caregivers for supports and services. These population increases require a workforce that is prepared to care for older adults in primary care and in all community and long-term care settings.

Currently, the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) is **the only federal program** designed to improve health care quality and safety for older adults, plus reduce associated costs of care through appropriate training of health care professionals, caregivers, and direct service workers. In 2015 the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) combined the geriatric education programs in Titles VII and VIII along with portions of the Alzheimer ’s Disease Prevention, Education, and Outreach Program to establish GWEPs.

Our 44 funded GWEPs in academic year 2015-16, have provided geriatric focused degree programs, field placements, and fellowships for 18,451 students and fellows; 59% of this training was in primary care and 35% of the care sites are located in underserved communities. GWEPs also provided 104,657 faculty and practicing professionals’ trainings in 1,173 unique continuing education courses to improve care and practice for current health care professionals because older adults are served by current practitioners. Thousands of health care providers and family caregivers are better prepared as a result of these trainings. GWEPs are critical to the training of physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, dentists, behavioral and mental health professionals, pharmacists, nurses, rehabilitation therapists, social workers, podiatrists, public health, allied health and other professionals providing care for frail and vulnerable older adults. Importantly, GWEPS all over the country also train family caregivers, volunteers, direct care staff and others who provide paid and unpaid care to older adults.

NAGE requests a total of at least $51 million for GWEPs. Our funding request would allow for eight additional GWEPs in rural and underserved communities. In this request, we propose to reestablish the Geriatrics Academic Career Award (GACA) by providing $100,000 to each GWEP to create a GACA. Current funding is $38.7 million in FY 2016. We recognize that the Subcommittee faces tough decisions in a constrained budget environment, but we believe that a continued commitment to geriatric education programs that help the nation’s health professions better serve the older and disabled population is critical. The nation faces a shortage of geriatric health professionals. There simply are not enough geriatricians, geriatric nurse practitioners and other health professionals trained to care for this rapidly increasing older population.

We all have stories of poor communication, conflicting multiple medications, dangerous transitions across care settings, and inappropriate hospitalizations. We believe that funding for GWEP-based geriatric education supports your important work to establish a sustainable future for the nation’s health care and Social Security systems by ensuring that (a) health care specialists trained in geriatric care do not become a rare and expensive resource and (b) direct service workers and family caregivers are prepared to support a lower cost, independent lifestyle for community residing elders.

GWEP centers train health care professions faculty, students, and field practitioners in interprofessional diagnosis, management and prevention of disease, disability, and other chronic health problems of older adults. They encourage team-based care, demand evidence-based practice, and appropriate management of older adults among caring professionals.

 Grantees also provided more than 1,349 different curricular most of which were new continuing education, academic courses and workshops which reached 57,557 people.

* GWEP grantees supported 331 different faculty-focused training programs and activities during the academic year, reaching 6,103 faculty-level trainees

New GWEP awardees received expanded authorization to provide to family caregivers and direct service workers instruction on prominent issues in the care of older adults, such as Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias, palliative care, self-care, chronic disease self-management, falls, and maintaining independence, among others.

Geriatric education programs have improved the supply, distribution, diversity, capabilities, and quality of health care professionals who care for our nation’s growing older adult population, including the underserved and minorities. We need your continued support for geriatric programs to adequately prepare the next generation of health professionals for the rapidly changing and emerging needs of the growing and aging population.

We absolutely agree with President Trump’s proclamation during Older Americans month “that, as we age, many of us will need more assistance from our friends and family.  We therefore recommit ourselves to ensuring that older Americans are not neglected or abused, receive the best healthcare available, live in suitable homes, have adequate income and economic opportunities, and enjoy freedom and independence in their golden years.  They deserve ‑‑ and we owe them ‑‑ nothing less.” To give older Americans the best healthcare, access to services and to ensure older adults are not abused and neglected, geriatric workforce enhancement programs are critical.

On behalf of NAGE and those who have benefitted in Florida and North Carolina and from our colleagues around the country, thank you for this opportunity to share our request for support for these critical programs. We ask that you thoughtfully consider our request for the modest increased funding of GWEPs in FY 2018.

NAGE is a non-profit membership organization representing Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Programs, Geriatric Education Centers, and other programs that provide education and training to health professionals in the areas of geriatrics and gerontology.