

Joint Letter to Appropriations Chairs and Ranking Members on the FY 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

July 14, 2006

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Chairman
U.S House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
U.S House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Chairmen Cochran and Lewis, Ranking Members Byrd and Obey:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge passage of Appropriations legislation that provides the President's request for \$169 million for Health Information Technology in his fiscal year 2007 Budget request. These funds will allow the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Michael Leavitt, to lead the effort to achieve the President's goal of electronic health records for all Americans within 10 years and begin positive change in our healthcare system.

The House Appropriations Committee has passed an FY'07 Labor-HHS Appropriations bill that provides \$148 million of the President's HIT request including \$50 million for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and \$98 million for the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC). Although this represents an increase over FY'06, we are concerned that without fully funding the President's request, the Secretary will be forced to delay or reduce in scope health information technology projects. Current projects are providing valuable information at the intersection of healthcare quality and IT including implementation insights, as well as driving standards for modern health information technology, devising certification procedures, developing electronic information architecture and testing privacy standards.

Members of the House and Senate and both parties recognize that information technology deployment will reduce medical errors, establish a more efficient and effective health care system, and help to reduce ballooning health care costs. By empowering clinicians with support tools to treat patients based on real-time, accurate, and complete medical information, we will transform the way healthcare is delivered in this country. Achieving this goal will require a long-term leadership commitment from the public and private sectors over a period of several years. Funding the President's request will help demonstrate Congress's leadership in taking the first few critical steps.

We strongly urge you to enact Appropriations legislation that fully funds the President's Budget request for healthcare information technology. We must advance the work of creating an interoperable healthcare system that improves the quality of care while controlling costs.

Sincerely,

IBM Corporation
eHealth Initiative
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS)
MEDecision
Oracle Corporation
National Business Group on Health
Intel Corporation
American College of Physicians
MEDecision
Business Roundtable
Allscripts
American Hospital Association
NCR Corporation
The National Alliance for Health Information Technology
ERISA Industry Committee (ERIC)
American Health Information Management Association
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
National Association of Manufacturers
HR Policy Association
McKesson Corporation
Sun Microsystems
Cerner
Healthcare Leadership Council

cc: The Honorable Arlen Specter, Chairman, U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies;

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Ranking Democrat, U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Ralph Regula, Chairman, U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies