Chairman Burgess, Ranking Member Green, and members of the Subcommittee, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) would like to thank the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide input on the reauthorization of Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs.

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) is a professional organization of more than 39,000 registered nurses and other health care providers dedicated to excellence in patient care, education, research, and administration in oncology nursing. ONS members are a diverse group of professionals who represent a variety of professional roles, practice settings, and subspecialty practice areas. As advocates for the nursing profession and our cancer patients, ONS welcomes the opportunity to inform the Subcommittee about the importance of the health care workforce programs included under the Public Health Service Act.

For five decades, the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs have helped build the supply and distribution of qualified nurses needed in all health care settings. The Title VIII programs bolster nursing education at all levels, from entry-level preparation through graduate study, and provide support for institutions that educate nurses to practice in rural and medically underserved communities.

Toni Flaspeter is an Oncology Nurse Navigator for Medstar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, DC and is one of the many ONS members who have benefited from Title VIII. She is a recipient of a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program scholarship. After completing her undergraduate education, Ms. Flaspeter was accepted into an accelerated second bachelor’s degree in nursing program at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Because this was a second bachelor’s degree, she had a difficult time finding any scholarships or financial aid to assist in the pursuit of her nursing career despite her searching efforts. After graduating with a BSN, she had accumulated significant school debt, and it took many months to find employment. She was paying approximately $1,400 a month in student loans.

In order to meet her student loan obligations, Ms. Flaspeter worked 12-hour shifts as a registered nurse five to six days a week, taking overtime, night and holiday shifts as much as possible to maximize her income, while still dealing with the pressure of living paycheck to paycheck. Additionally, she took part time jobs and lived on a very tight budget. While she describes the Title VIII program application process as “very intense” with having to upload about 30 documents, it
ultimately helped to pay for 60 percent of her unpaid education over a two-year period. The Title VIII assistance was instrumental in improving her finances, mental health, and productivity. Ms. Flaspeter was so encouraged by the Title VIII program and its benefits that she decided to mentor other nursing applicants through the scholarship process.

Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs are a direct investment in the nursing workforce, patient well-being, and the sustainability of our nation’s health care system. The Title VIII Nursing Workforce Reauthorization Act (H.R. 959/S. 1109) has already been introduced with strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. ONS urges you to demonstrate your commitment to America’s future nursing workforce by passing reauthorization legislation in a timely manner.

Thank you again for taking our written comments into consideration. The Oncology Nursing Society looks forward to working with the Subcommittee on issues of importance to the nursing profession and our cancer patients.