

May 13, 2008

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-9575

The Honorable Bob Filner
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-2034

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-8908

The Honorable Steve Buyer
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-5486

Dear Chairmen Akaka and Filner and Ranking Members Burr and Buyer:

On behalf of working families across the country, we urge you to support S. 2824/HR. 4089 to restore the collective bargaining rights of health care professionals who care for veterans at the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) medical facilities.

S. 2824/H.R. 4089 is greatly needed to clarify that key VA medical personnel (including registered nurses, physicians, physician assistants, chiropractors, podiatrists, and optometrists) have the same rights to grieve and arbitrate over working conditions as other VA clinicians and clinicians at military hospitals and other federal facilities.

This legislation is also the most effective tool available to Congress to boost recruitment and retention of VA clinicians needed to treat a rapidly growing veteran population. VA management regularly blocks grievances over workplace rights that Congress specifically put in place over the past decade to address recruitment and retention problems, for example, nurse locality pay, alternative work schedules and mandatory overtime limits, and physician performance bonuses and reimbursement for professional education.

Over the past three years, the VA Undersecretary of Health – who has the sole authority to determine which disputes are grievable – has ruled against the employees in 100% of the cases reviewed. At a time when VA clinicians are being asked to care for more veterans with severe injuries, mental health problems and chronic illnesses than ever before, we cannot afford to continue this relentless attack on morale and workplace rights.

Again, working men and women need your support for S. 2824/H.R. 4089 as it moves through the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs and through the Senate/House floors. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely yours,

American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO
Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, AFL-CIO
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, AFL-CIO
Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO
National Association of Government Employees
National Federation of Federal Employees, AFL-CIO
Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO
United American Nurses, AFL-CIO
United Auto Workers of America, AFL-CIO
United Steelworkers, AFL-CIO