

March 3, 2011

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Committee on appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Sirs:

On behalf of the Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare I am writing to express our deep concern that the President's Fiscal 2012 budget proposes the elimination of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Education and Research Centers (ERCs). This will terminate the ERCs nationwide, including the Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center, based in Colorado.

NIOSH supports 17 university-based Education and Research Centers (ERCs). The mission of the ERCs is to reduce work-related injuries and illnesses in the U.S. by performing prevention research and by educating high-quality professionals who daily implement programs to improve occupational health and safety. The **Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center** trains Occupational Medicine Physicians, Industrial Hygienists, Ergonomists, Health Physicists (radiation health), and Occupational Health Psychologists and provide continuing education to all sectors of the safety and health community. Collectively, the ERCs provide training and research resources to every Public Health Region in the United States. Many centers are collaborative efforts among several institutions in their region. The Mountain and Plains ERC is a collaboration of the University of Colorado, Colorado State University, National Jewish Health, Denver Health and Hospitals, and University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center.

The Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center helps serve a 7 state region, including Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. Graduates of the training program are in high demand in the region to join and often lead health and safety teams for businesses and agencies that are committed to controlling the personal and economic costs associated with work-related injuries and illnesses.

The Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare (AOHP) has been a partner with the Mountain and Plains ERC for approximately two years. Through this partnership, the AOHP membership has had increased access to education via AOHP's annual national conference, support via scholarships for education in occupational health and education through webinars. The ERC staff has also had the opportunity to be represented as an exhibitor at AOHP's annual national conference. All of these activities in turn have increased the knowledge AOHP's membership has about NIOSH and the ERC's. Also, many of our members live and work in areas near the ERC's. They have benefited greatly through these centers regarding education and research in occupational health, obtaining advanced degrees, taught for some of the courses at these centers and participated in research. All of this in turn affects the health, safety and well being of the work force in the United States which benefits each and every one of us.

ERC trainees are committed to reducing the daily toll on workers: each year almost 1.2 million workers are injured seriously enough to require time off work, and daily an average of 9,000 U.S. workers sustain disabling injuries on the job, 16 workers die from an injury suffered at work, and 137 workers die from work-related diseases. This burden costs industry and citizens about \$1 billion per week. The elimination of the ERCs as proposed in the President's budget would limit the ability of workers to avoid exposures that can result in injury or illness, push back improved working conditions for workers and ultimately raise health care costs.

The ERCs provide programs in a unique group of disciplines that benefit employers of all sizes in every part of the country. The ERCs tracks job placement of students and career development; thus they can document that students enter and stay in a career path that utilizes their training. Most Mountain and Plains ERC graduates work throughout the west for small and large companies, including engineering companies, mining, agriculture, healthcare, construction, among others.

I urge you to recognize the important contributions of the ERCs to the health and productivity of our nation's workforce by including funding in the Fiscal 2012 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill for the Education and Research Centers within the budget for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Sandra Domeracki, RN, FNP, COHN-S
AOHP Executive President