

NEWS

Association for Healthcare Philanthropy

February 17, 2009

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Philanthropic Fundraising Activities in Stimulus Bill Preserved Thanks to the Efforts of the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy

WASHINGTON, D.C., (February 17, 2009) – Little known language in the economic stimulus bill, which would have seriously damaged philanthropic fundraising efforts by nonprofit hospitals – resulting in fewer donated dollars from grateful patients and a loss of essential health care services provided to the uninsured and underinsured – was successfully removed at the 11th hour thanks to the efforts of the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy (AHP).

Under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) nonprofit hospitals and their foundations – using fundraising outreach that is tightly controlled to protect patients' privacy – are allowed to seek donations from individuals who have been patients in their hospitals. The privacy of the patients in the context of this type of fundraising found virtually no examples that the information was compromised under HIPAA, a fact acknowledged in letters to AHP in 2007 and 2008 by the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Health and Human Services. For reasons unknown, the Congressional stimulus package debated by Congress last week had contained language removing this practice.

In a fact sheet distributed to lawmakers, now available on www.ahp.org, AHP President and Chief Executive Officer William C. McGinly warned that if the language had passed, fewer philanthropic dollars would come into nonprofit hospitals, straining operating budgets and limiting financial resources. The ultimate result would have been cuts in free services to the poor such as clinics, mammography screenings, hearing tests, and child immunizations, he warned. McGinly stressed with lawmakers that “with the Nation in a recession and America's health care needs increasing, now is not the time to impose obstacles to philanthropic fundraising that do nothing to enhance patient privacy and will ultimately diminish and discourage philanthropy.”

AHP's efforts worked and drew the attention and support of others in the philanthropic and non-profit communities. The troubling language was removed in favor of the House-Senate conference committee language, which is similar to existing HIPAA requirements. In a letter to AHP membership, McGinly said, “The efforts of AHP and our members have been a great success. Thank you to all who have supported our profession as we fought this important issue.”

Members of the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy include 5,000 fundraising professionals, development staff, public relations professionals, trustees, marketing professionals, administrators, and executives interested in health care fundraising. In 2003, AHP launched its Performance Benchmarking Service, which establishes standard metrics and industry best practices for fundraising success.

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