



December 18, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
Office of the President-elect
451 6th Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear President-elect Obama:

On behalf of the members of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM), I write to congratulate you on your stunning electoral victory and applaud your commitment to achieving meaningful health care reform. We pledge our support to work with you to achieve the truly transformational changes that are needed to improve access, quality and value in our health care system.

More than 11,000 Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs) and Certified Midwives (CMs) provide comprehensive women's health care in every state in the country. CNMs and CMs are skilled in the independent management of health care for women of all ages. Our broad scope of practice includes primary care, family planning and gynecologic care, and care during pregnancy and childbirth.

CNMs attended 306,377 births in the US in 2005, according to the most recent report of the National Center for Health Statistics, accounting for 11.2% of all vaginal births. Many CNMs and CMs are on the front lines serving vulnerable populations, and we see the difficulties women and their families face in navigating our health care system. Cesarean sections and other medical interventions are steadily increasing—often without indication—and are unnecessarily escalating the cost of care. At the same time, infant mortality is higher than nearly every other industrialized country, and maternal mortality increased in 2004 for the first time in decades. It is clear that the health care system is not working for women now. A shortage of maternity and primary care providers is emerging, and some hospitals are closing their labor and delivery units. Bold action is needed to avert a future crisis.

As a nation, we can and must do better. Health care reform must focus on expanding access to needed services while improving outcomes. Certified nurse-midwives and certified midwives have the breadth and depth of knowledge, education and experience to provide proven, evidence-based and cost-effective solutions to these challenges. ACNM members encourage you to prioritize improved access to quality maternity and primary care and look forward to working with you on specific policy strategies to achieve this goal.

To this end, ACNM seeks an opportunity to meet with your staff early in your Administration to further discuss these issues. We can provide case studies from the US and other industrialized countries where midwifery has been strategically expanded to improve outcomes and yield cost savings. Barriers that impede women's access to midwifery services include inequitable reimbursement and inconsistent regulations under

current federal health programs; limitations on access to hospital privileges; and skyrocketing professional liability costs that are forcing an exodus of safe and well-qualified providers. These policies deny women their choice of provider and needlessly increase health costs system-wide. We welcome the opportunity to share the value of midwifery care and the key role that CNMs and CMs can play in achieving tangible improvements in women's lives.

Thank you for your service to our nation at this critical time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa D. Avery". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Melissa D. Avery, PhD, CNM, FACNM, FAAN
President