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in Emergency Medicine

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May 16, 2004

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

The American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM) has grave concerns regarding H.R. 3722, the "Undocumented Alien Emergency Medical Assistance Amendments of 2004," and urges you to oppose this legislation. We firmly believe this bill will create unnecessary barriers to life saving treatments at emergency departments nationwide. AAEM also contends that it will severely undermine Section 1011 of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA) – appropriating essential resources for hospitals providing life saving emergency care to undocumented aliens – by imposing new burdensome requirements on emergency department personnel in order to receive any of the resources from Section 1011.

Enforcing the Nation's immigration laws is not an appropriate role for emergency department personnel. We are not INS agents. Our emergency departments are mandated by law to provide care to anyone who walks through our doors – regardless of race, ethnicity or citizenship status. H.R. 3722 would require us to demand and upload personal data – including such "identifiers" as fingerprints and digital photographs – on undocumented aliens to an electronic database set up by the Departments of Homeland Security and of Health and Human Services for deportation purposes. This legislation would virtually ensure that illegal immigrants will avoid getting the health care they need, when they need it. This situation could pose a significant public health threat since the fear of deportation would inevitably prevent undocumented aliens from seeking care until it may be too late.

In today's delivery of healthcare in an emergency department, the urgency of providing lifesaving care takes precedence over anything else. We do not believe that H.R. 3722 is in the best interest of the patients we serve. Requiring us to collect this data diverts us from doing our job of caring for patients.

The American Academy of Emergency Medicine and its more than 4,000 emergency medicine physicians urges you to oppose H.R. 3722 when it comes to a vote.

Sincerely yours,

A. Antoine Kazzi, MD FAAEM

Similar letters were sent to the full House Leadership.