

February 15, 1999

The Honorable Robert F. Bennett  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bennett:

The American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP), representing over 100,000 internal medicine physicians, sub-specialists in internal medicine and medical students, is very much concerned about issues related to protecting the confidentiality of medical information, and wishes to express our support for your bill, the Medical Information Protection Act of 1998. As the nation's largest medical specialty society, our membership includes physicians who are directly involved in patient care, medical education, and medical research. The diversity of our membership gives us a special perspective on the challenge of balancing the protection of privacy of patient records with the needs of researchers for access to medical information.

As you may recall, at the October 1997 hearing of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources and subsequently, the College expressed concerns that legislation to protect the confidentiality of medical records might impede or prevent access to data that are essential for medical, public health, and health services research. Many types of clinical research require access to individually identifiable health information. Researchers take great pains to protect the privacy of information in an individual's patient record. They have an excellent record of protecting the privacy of individuals. The ACP-ASIM has supported the recommendations of the Secretary of Health and Human Services to allow disclosure of health information for clinical research on specific conditions without prior patient authorization.

The Medical Information Protection Act of 1998 responds to our concerns and provides strong safeguards to assure the protection of patient privacy. Accordingly, we are pleased to express our support, and we would welcome any opportunity to assist in enactment of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Harold C. Sox, MD, FACP