file

NATIONAL CAPITAL POISON CENTER
3201 New Mexico Ave, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20016

202-625-3333 (emergency line)
202-362-3867 (administrative line)
202-362-8377 (fax)

January 18, 1995

Melanne Verveer
Deputy Chief of Staff for
the First Lady
The White House
Old Executive Office Building - Room 100
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Ms. Verveer:

We met at a reception for Mrs. Clinton prior to her discussion at the First Ladies series held at the Mayflower Hotel last month. It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to thank Mrs. Clinton personally for her invaluable assistance in helping us avert the closure of the National Capital Poison Center last year.

The attached letter serves as a more complete explanation of where the Poison Center has been since then. There has been a very recent and unfortunate turn of events that again threatens the continued existence of the Center.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding this pressing matter and are hopeful that we can count on continued support from the First Lady on behalf of the children in the national capital area.

Sincerely,

Lea Ann Bernick
Executive Associate

Enclosure

NATIONAL CAPITAL POISON CENTER
3201 New Mexico Ave, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20016

202-625-3333 (emergency line)
202-362-3867 (administrative line)
202-362-8377 (fax)

January 16, 1995

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20006

Dear Mrs. Clinton:

Thank you for your efforts to save the National Capital Poison Center. Because of your previous interest and involvement, I thought you would want to know that the Center is in jeopardy again.

In July 1994, after two narrowly-averted closures, the National Capital Poison Center left Georgetown University, its home for the prior 13 years. The Poison Center became an independent nonprofit corporation affiliated with The George Washington University Medical Center. The Poison Center is responsible for all its own expenses.

The transition and rescue were made possible by legislative appropriations in Virginia, Maryland, and DC for FY '95 (July '94 through June '95), although the appropriated funds covered only 74% of the $1.1 million minimum annual cost of operating the Poison Center. Contributions from corporations, foundations, hospitals, and grateful users would have to make up the difference. Virginia appropriated $330,000; Maryland contributed $290,000; and the District of Columbia paid $47,000 for July through September '94 and appropriated another $190,000 for October '94 through September '95, but later cut the $190,000 from the DC budget. These contributions were intended to be proportional to utilization, with 51% of calls to the Center originating in Virginia, 30% from Maryland, and 18% from the District of Columbia.

Despite the 1994 grass roots community efforts to save the Poison Center, we have recently learned that funding for the National Capital Poison Center is not yet in the budget in Maryland, Virginia or DC for our next fiscal year (July '95 through June '96). Once again, the National Capital Poison Center faces the possibility of closure. Moreover, a study by Virginia's Department of Planning and Budget shows that all three poison centers currently serving Virginia are on the brink of closure.....likely leaving all Virginians (not just those served by this Center) without poison center services by 1996. In a report to the state legislature, this agency strongly recommends full funding of a poison center system composed of two sites, including the National Capital Poison Center and the University of Virginia's Poison Center.

The issue is straightforward, non-partisan, and eminently logical. Poison centers save lives and decrease health care costs. This Poison Center handles nearly 30,000 poisonings annually, and with its sophisticated staff and vigilant follow-up, safely guides the management

of 75% of these poisonings *at home*. **Every dollar spent on a poison center saves at least $7.75 in unnecessary health care expenses** by eliminating unnecessary emergency department visits, hospital admissions, and ambulance runs.

The National Capital Poison Center is the Washington area's only poison center. It's widely recognized as one of the best in the U.S., one of only 40 nationally certified regional centers. (Unfortunately only half of the U.S. population is served by a poison center that meets minimal national standards.) The Poison Center is staffed 24-hours-a-day by dedicated specialists in poison information. Each of these clinically experienced RN specialists has years of experience in toxicology and has passed a national certifying examination. For more difficult cases, a board-certified physician toxicologist is always available for back-up.

The Center serves the federal government, too, and is regularly consulted by postal inspectors seeking to identify drugs sent through the mail, by occupational health units in federal buildings, by nurses at the National Zoo and the Smithsonian regarding employees and visitors, and by government and military personnel serving overseas who consider this their "home" poison center. A few memorable incidents include:

- Consultation from an American Embassy on Thanksgiving Day. The turkey stuffing had been prepared by a foreign chef with chopped hyacinth bulbs instead of onions. Was it safe to eat the stuffing (NO!) or the turkey (YES!)? Dinner was served, and 200 guests were NOT poisoned, thanks to our advice.

- Emergency consultation to determine the toxic hazard posed by any retained portions of lead azide bullets.

We need your help, again, to avert this local crisis. A United Nation's resolution urges the establishment of poison centers in all nations, even those that are poor or developing. Should there not be a poison center to serve the capital of the United States?

We thank you for your past efforts on behalf of the children of the Washington metropolitan area, and invite you to visit the Center at any time.

Sincerely,

Toby Litovitz, MD
Director