

June 10, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to the health and wellbeing of the nation's children, we write to request \$165 million in funding for the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program in the Senate Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, in line with what the Senate has provided in previous fiscal years, and to thank you for the stable and consistent funding this program has enjoyed over the past several years.

From conception through adulthood, children grow and develop rapidly, and we have an increasing understanding that the environment in which they live—with its physical, chemical, biological, and psychosocial influences—has a significant impact on their health and development. We know that children are not simply “little adults,” but have very different physiological responses to environmental influences than adults. The ECHO program is designed to investigate these influences to determine how they underpin the foundations of child health and how they impact an individual's long-term health. By answering crucial questions about the childhood antecedents of the costly diseases of adulthood, we can improve treatment, better prevent illness, and increase the health of the population across the lifespan.

The ECHO program funds research activities in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico and brings together 84 existing longitudinal cohort studies of children. By using studies already in place and that have already proven successful, the ECHO program is poised to quickly and efficiently deliver important insights into child development. For instance, a study funded by the ECHO program and other NIH Institutes recently found that low-income rural children are at higher risk for second- and third-hand smoke exposure than previously believed and offered suggestions for ways to reduce risk for young children.

Recently, ECHO partnered with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to create the Advancing Clinical Trials in Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (ACT NOW) study to evaluate treatment options for newborns with neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, a condition caused by exposure to opioids during pregnancy. ACT NOW is an important part of efforts to find and implement best practices for infants with opioid withdrawal.

In addition, ECHO has prioritized four key areas of pediatric outcomes, including asthma, obesity, autism, and obstetric and neonatal outcomes, such as preterm birth, in order to ensure that this research is meaningful in addressing some of the most common ailments among children. The study will also be looking at the impact of the environment on measures of healthy child development.

The ECHO program also includes an IDeA States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network focused on ensuring that children in rural and medically underserved locations can participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials. The network has sites in 17 states and utilizes states targeted by the NIH Institutional Development Awards (IDeA) Program, which is designed to broaden the geographic distribution of biomedical and behavioral research. This will not only ensure access to world-class care for children and their families, but ensure that the research reflects a broad spectrum of both environments and participants.

We urge you to continue to support this important research initiative to improve the health of children.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Pediatric Society  
American Psychological Association  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Thoracic Society  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of Population Centers  
Child Neurology Society  
Children's Hospital & Medical Center Omaha  
Endocrine Society  
Human Animal Bond Research Institute  
March of Dimes  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Council on Family Relations  
National Environmental Health Association  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National PKU Alliance  
Nemours Children's Health System  
Pediatric Policy Council  
Population Association of America  
Society for Pediatric Research  
Society for the Study of Reproduction  
Society of Toxicology  
Teratology Society  
University of Montana