

August 25, 2020

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 organizations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and adolescents, we urge you to include \$50 million in funding for the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP) in the Senate Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill and prioritize the inclusion of this funding in a final omnibus spending bill. Understanding the need to support our pediatric medical and mental health workforce amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress recently reauthorized this important Title VII health professions program in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. We are asking you to complete the job by funding this critically important program.

Serious shortages of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists are causing decreased access to care for young people. With the possibility that telehealth can help children in rural and underserved areas access specialty care, demand on pediatric subspecialists will only grow. Without a federal investment in the pediatric subspecialty physician workforce, children will continue to face long wait times for subspecialty care, possibly traveling long distances to receive that care, or going without care altogether.

The longstanding need to bolster access to specialized care for children has become all the more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ideally, children requiring specialized care should have access to the care they need directly in their communities. We know that the clinical evidence about children's risk of serious illness from COVID-19 is rapidly changing. The uncertainty surrounding the science underscores the need for children and their families to have access to the care they need to get and stay well. Timely access to care from pediatric subspecialists is critical to managing chronic conditions and treating serious acute illness. In addition, social isolation and the closure of schools can exacerbate mental health concerns among children. Addressing child mental health is essential to maintaining child well-being. Additionally, traveling long distances for care exposes families to unnecessary risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus, when telehealth is not a medically acceptable and available alternative.

The time to begin investing in the pediatric subspecialty workforce is now. Congress rightly recognized the importance of addressing critical health care workforce issues in the CARES Act by reauthorizing a number of the Title VII Health Professions Programs administered by the Health Resources and Services

Administration (HRSA), including PSLRP. An initial investment of \$50 million in the coming year would allow HRSA to implement this program and begin to address subspecialty shortages in communities nationwide.

PSLRP will provide qualifying child health professionals with up to \$35,000 in loan repayment annually in exchange for practicing in an underserved area for at least two years. This targeted financial support shows great promise in addressing the underlying economic factors that are driving subspecialty shortages and ultimately in ensuring children can access the care they need.

As you deliberate the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations package, we strongly urge you to include funding for PSLRP and to advocate its inclusion in any final omnibus spending package. Thank you for your consideration of this issue and for your longstanding commitment to investing in child health. If you have any questions, please contact James Baumberger at [jbaumberger@aap.org](mailto:jbaumberger@aap.org) or 202-347-8600.

Sincerely,

AANS/CNS Section on Pediatric Neurological Surgery  
Academic Pediatric Association  
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
American Academy of Neurology  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus  
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons  
American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Epilepsy Society  
American Pediatric Society  
American Pediatric Surgical Association  
American Society of Nephrology  
American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Society of Pediatric Neurosurgeons  
American Society of Pediatric Otolaryngology  
American Thoracic Society  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of Pediatric Program Directors (APPD)  
Child Neurology Society  
Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance

Children's Hospital Association  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties (CoPS)  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Endocrine Society  
International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
March of Dimes  
Mental Health America  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Coalition for Infant Health  
National Infusion Center Association (NICA)  
Nemours Children's Health System  
North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology  
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition  
Pediatric Endocrine Society  
Pediatric Policy Council  
Pediatric Pulmonology Training Directors Association  
Scoliosis Research Society  
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (SAHM)  
Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics  
Society for Pediatric Dermatology  
Society for Pediatric Research  
Society of Critical Care Medicine  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
U.S. Pain Foundation