

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 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