

October 12, 2017

The Honorable Michael C. Burgess  
Chair, Health Subcommittee  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gene Green  
Ranking Member, Health Subcommittee  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Burgess and Ranking Member Green:

On behalf of organizations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and adolescents, we write to urge you to include support for loan repayment for pediatric subspecialists as part of the effort to reauthorize the Title VII health professions workforce programs. Support for pediatric subspecialists is a needed step toward curbing today's demonstrated critical shortage of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and pediatric mental health specialists to help provide children with timely access to the vital health services they need.

Currently, there is not only a shortage but also a significant disparity in the geographic distribution of pediatric subspecialists trained to treat children in need of specialty care, resulting in many children in underserved areas not receiving timely or appropriate health care. Children and their families often face long waiting lists to see subspecialists or must travel long distances to find needed care. According to a recent survey conducted by the Children's Hospital Association, appointment wait times for certain pediatric subspecialty care far exceed the prevailing benchmark of two-weeks in children's hospitals. The survey showed that the average time for a developmental pediatric specialist is 14.5 weeks, 8.9 weeks for neurology, and 7.5 weeks for child and adolescent psychiatry, citing just a few examples.

Shortages threaten to become more severe as fewer medical students choose careers in pediatric mental health care and pediatric subspecialties. There are three primary economic disincentives that discourage medical students from pursuing careers in pediatric subspecialties: (1) additional training beyond their primary residency training of 2-3 years on average, (2) high loan debt due to longer training;<sup>1</sup> and (3) average Medicaid reimbursement that is 30 percent less than Medicare. In addition, the shortage of pediatric subspecialists is compounded both by an aging physician workforce, where the mean age of pediatric subspecialists exceeds 50 years,<sup>2</sup> and by the growing number of children in the United States. In 2011, there were 73.9 million children in the United States, 1.5 million more than in 2000. This number is expected to grow to 101.6 million by 2050, increasing demand for pediatric health care services.<sup>3</sup>

Timely access to pediatric subspecialists is essential. Longer lag times between symptom onset and treatment may not only result in poorer outcomes but also in greater costs to patients and the health care system. Support for pediatric subspecialty loan repayment will help ameliorate shortages by providing a financial incentive for trainees to choose careers in pediatric subspecialties.

Thank you for your dedication to the health and well-being of children. We look forward to working with you to improve child access to pediatric subspecialists.

Sincerely,

AANS/CNS Section on Pediatric Neurological Surgery  
Academic Pediatric Association  
Advocacy Council of ACAAI  
American Academy of Dermatology Association  
American Academy of Neurology  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons  
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics  
American College of Rheumatology  
American College of Surgeons  
American Medical Association  
American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine  
American Pediatric Society  
American Pediatric Surgical Association  
American Society for Surgery of the Hand  
American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Society of Pediatric Neurosurgeons  
American Society of Pediatric Otolaryngology  
American Thoracic Society  
American Urological Association  
Arthritis Foundation  
Arthroscopy Association of North America  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities  
Child Neurology Foundation  
Child Neurology Society  
Children's Hospital Association  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
Endocrine Society  
Heart Rhythm Society  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.

Lupus Foundation of America  
March of Dimes  
Mental Health America  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Organization for Rare Disorders  
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition  
Pediatric Endocrine Society  
Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society  
Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America  
Pediatric Policy Council  
Scoliosis Research Society  
Societies for Pediatric Urology  
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine  
Society for Pediatric Dermatology  
Society for Pediatric Research  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

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<sup>1</sup>Frintner MP, Mulvey HJ, Pletcher BA, Olson LM. "Pediatric Resident Debt and Career Intentions." *Pediatrics*. 2013. Rochlin JM, Simon HK. "Does Fellowship Pay: What is the Long-Term Financial Impact of Subspecialty Training in Pediatrics?" *Pediatrics*. 2011 Feb;127(2):254-60.

<sup>2</sup> Werner RM, Polsky D. "Comparing the Supply of Pediatric Subspecialists and Child Neurologists." *Journal of Pediatrics*. 2005 Jan; 146(1):20-5.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2012*. Available at: <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/health.asp>