

May 17, 2022

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

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

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

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

Dear Chair Leahy, Vice Chair Shelby, Chair Murray, and Ranking Member Blunt:

On behalf of organizations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and adolescents, we write to thank you for the inclusion of first-time funding for the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 and request \$30 million in funding for PSLRP in the Senate FY 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

The initial funding for PSLRP in FY 2022 is allowing the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to begin the important work of implementing PSLRP after Congress reauthorized this program on a bipartisan basis. The new program will provide loan repayment for pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child mental health professionals who care for children in underserved areas, addressing critical shortages of these highly trained professionals by lessening financial disincentives for pursuing pediatric specialty training. An increased investment in FY 2023 will ensure this much-needed support can reach additional pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child mental health professionals.

Serious shortages of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, child and adolescent psychiatrists, and other pediatric mental health professionals are impeding access to care for young people. Without a federal investment in the pediatric medical subspecialty, pediatric surgical specialty, and child mental health workforce, children will continue to face long wait times for subspecialty care, need to travel long distances to receive that care, or go without care altogether.

Children are currently facing a mental health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many children have experienced disruptions in their daily lives, isolation from peers and supportive adults, loss of family members from COVID-19, and increased family stress, all of which can impact mental health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published data showing that the proportion of child emergency department visits that were for mental health reasons increased 24% for children 5 to 11 and 31% for children 12 to 17, during the pandemic.<sup>i</sup> Unfortunately, there

are too few child mental health professionals to care for these children, including a shortage of child psychiatrists in every state.<sup>ii</sup> Data also suggest that the pandemic has resulted in significantly higher rates of suicidal behavior in youth, and suicide is now the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24.<sup>iii</sup>

Ideally, children requiring specialized care should have access to the care they need close to their communities, but this is often not the case. Millions of children reside 1.5 hours or more from access to needed specialty care.<sup>iv</sup> One quarter of children in the United States, for instance, live greater than a 55-mile drive away from a pediatric rheumatologist, complicating care for children with juvenile arthritis.<sup>v</sup>

Timely access to care from pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child mental health professionals is critical to managing chronic conditions and treating serious acute illness. Severe shortages of developmental-behavioral pediatricians, for example, result in children waiting an average of 5-6 months for the autism testing and diagnosis needed to be able to receive important early intervention services.

Now is a crucial time to increase investments in the pediatric medical subspecialty, pediatric surgical specialty, and child mental health workforce. PSLRP's bipartisan support is a reflection of Congress's recognition of the importance of addressing critical pediatric health care workforce shortages. An investment of \$30 million in the coming year will allow HRSA to ensure more communities have access to subspecialty and child mental health care by addressing underlying economic factors that are driving subspecialty shortages so children can access the care they need.

As you deliberate the Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations package, we strongly urge you to include \$30 million in funding for PSLRP. Thank you for your consideration of this issue and for your longstanding commitment to investing in child mental and physical health. If you have any questions, please contact James Baumberger at [jbaumberger@aap.org](mailto:jbaumberger@aap.org).

Sincerely,

AANS/CNS Section on Pediatric Neurological Surgery  
Academic Pediatric Association  
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 for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons  
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
American College of Cardiology

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Pediatric Society  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Society of Hematology  
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  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Child Neurology Society  
Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance  
Children's Hospital Association  
Children's Wisconsin  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Endocrine Society  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
International Foundation for Arthritis  
International OCD Foundation  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
March of Dimes  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Coalition for Infant Health  
Nemours Children's Health  
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  
Pediatric Pulmonology Training Directors Association (PEPTDA)  
Prevent Blindness  
REDC Consortium  
Societies for Pediatric Urology  
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine  
Society for Pediatric Research  
Society of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons  
ZERO TO THREE

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<sup>i</sup> Leeb RT, et al. "Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 1–October 17, 2020." *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2020;69:1675–1680. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6945a3>external icon.

<sup>ii</sup> Turner A, et al. "Comparison of Number and Geographic Distribution of Pediatric Subspecialists and Patient Proximity to Specialized Care in the US Between 2003 and 2019." *JAMA Pediatrics.* doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1124. Published online May 18, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Hill RM, et al. "Suicide Ideation and Attempts in a Pediatric Emergency Department Before and During COVID-19." *Pediatrics.* December 2020, e2020029280; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-029280>.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Advocacy/Federal\\_and\\_State\\_Initiatives/Workforce\\_Maps/Home.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Advocacy/Federal_and_State_Initiatives/Workforce_Maps/Home.aspx)