

July 26, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS and Education
131 Dirksen SOB
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS and Education
156 Dirksen SOB
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dennis Rehberg
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS and Education
1001 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS and Education
2358 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairman Rehberg, Ranking Member Shelby, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We write to you out of concern that the number of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and pediatric mental health specialists today is inadequate to meet the growing health needs of America's children. There is a significant disparity in the geographic distribution of pediatric specialists across the country to treat these very sick children, resulting in many children in underserved rural and urban areas not receiving timely health care. Compounding the problem, fewer individuals are choosing careers in pediatric subspecialties and pediatric mental health care, while the existing workforce continues to age. Financial concerns, such as debt load, due to longer training requirements are a significant factor and a deterrent influencing career choice.

We were pleased when this critical challenge facing American families in locating and accessing pediatric subspecialists was addressed in Section 5203, "Health Care Workforce Loan Repayment Programs" of the Affordable Care Act. This section requires the Health and Human Services Secretary to establish and implement a pediatric specialty loan repayment program. Eligible participants must agree to work full-time for not less than two years in a pediatric medical specialty, a pediatric surgical specialty, or in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health in a health professional shortage area or a medically underserved area as determined by the Secretary. In return, the program will pay up to \$35,000 in loan repayment for each year of service, for a maximum of three years. The law authorizes \$30 million for each of FY 2010 through FY 2014 for loan repayments for pediatric medical specialists and pediatric surgical specialists and \$20 million for each of FY 2010 through FY 2013 for loan repayments for child and adolescent mental and behavioral health professionals. Unfortunately, the law did not appropriate resources for this needed initiative.

As you deliberate on a final FY 2012 appropriations package, we urge you to include \$5 million within the Health Resources and Services Administration to provide initial funding for Section 5203. Our nation desperately needs specialists specifically trained to treat the growing number of American children with serious physical and mental health conditions. It is vital that initial funding for this program be provided as soon as possible. Thank you for giving this request all appropriate consideration.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons Section on
 Pediatric Neurological Surgery
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Cardiology
American College of Surgeons
American College of Rheumatology
American Pediatric Society
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology
American Society of Pediatric Neurosurgeons
American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology
American Thoracic Society
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Child Neurology Society
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties
National Association of Children's Hospitals
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
Pediatric Endocrine Society
Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America
Society for Pediatric Research

cc: Members, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
 Members, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education