

October 1, 2010

Hon. Tom Harkin, Chairman  
Senate Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
on Appropriations  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Thad Cochran, Ranking Member  
Senate Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
on Appropriations  
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. David R. Obey, Chairman  
House Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
on Appropriations  
2358 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Todd Tiahrt, Ranking Member  
House Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On behalf of 60,000 pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), as well as the subspecialty organizations listed below, we write to thank you for your continued commitment to pediatric providers and to draw your attention to a critical challenge facing the sickest of America's children and their families: timely access to pediatric subspecialist and pediatric surgical specialist care.

The Affordable Care Act recognized the seriousness of this situation, addressing it in Sec. 5203, "Health Care Workforce Loan Repayment Programs." This provision, authorized by P.L. 111-148 and P.L. 111-192 but not yet appropriated, is designed to address the current severe problem that children have in locating and accessing pediatric subspecialist and pediatric surgical specialist care. Currently in the United States there are approximately 28,000 pediatric medical subspecialists and surgical specialists that care for over 80 million American children.

While the number of pediatric subspecialists has increased somewhat in the past ten years, many pediatric subspecialties report very low numbers of physicians currently being trained. The American Board of Pediatrics reports that in 2006 there were only 21 first year fellows training in adolescent medicine, 29 in developmental behavioral pediatrics and 32 in pediatric rheumatology. In addition, there are currently fewer than 7,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists practicing in the United States, yet there is a need for almost 30,000. As can be expected, the shortage for all pediatric subspecialty and surgical specialty care is most severe in rural areas.

The impending crisis is further compounded by the aging of our existing pediatric subspecialty workforce. With the exception of pediatricians specializing in emergency medicine – a relatively new subspecialty – the mean age of pediatric subspecialists exceeds 50 years.

And as the workforce continues to shrink, demand for pediatric subspecialty care has reached unprecedented levels. Over the past decade, the pediatric population has experienced dramatic

increases in the incidence and prevalence of conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, asthma, depression, diabetes, obesity and increased demand for surgical correction of cleft lip and palate, congenital heart disease and orthopedic anomalies.

Sec. 5203 will incentivize training and practice in pediatric medical subspecialties in underserved areas across the United States by establishing and implementing a loan repayment program of up to \$35,000 for each year of service for a maximum of three years. The program is authorized at \$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.

By fully funding this authorization, more graduating pediatricians and mental and behavioral health professionals will choose to train and practice in these specialties and more of America's children will be able to access the specialized medical care they so desperately need.

AAP and the other undersigned organizations urge the committees to fully fund Sec. 5203 at its authorized levels and thanks you again for all of your efforts on behalf of children and pediatricians. We look forward to working with you over the coming months to work to improve our nation's health care system to benefit America's children.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Pediatric Society  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Thoracic Society  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Child Neurology Society  
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties  
National Association of Children's Hospitals  
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition  
Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics  
Society for Pediatric Research

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