## February 5, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer Majority Leader United States Senate 322 Hart Senate Office Building Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell Minority Leader United States Senate 317 Russell Senate Office Building Washington DC, 20510 The Honorable Nancy Pelosi Speaker United States House of Representatives 1236 Longworth House Office Building Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy Minority Leader United States House of Representatives 2468 Rayburn House Office Building Washington DC, 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to bring to your attention an urgent situation that continues to need Congressional action to help correct: a sustained decrease in immunization rates for recommended vaccines across all ages. A bill introduced this week, the *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act (H.R. 736/S. 167)*, addresses this situation and we urge you to include it in the next COVID-19 legislative package.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is a dramatic fall in immunization rates among children and adults. The reduction in childhood immunization rates was noted early on in the pandemic in the May 8 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), which showed a significant decrease in orders for Vaccines for Children (VFC)-funded, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended non-influenza childhood vaccines, as well as measles-containing vaccines, from January 6 through April 19, 2020, when compared to the same time period in 2019. Additional analysis from VaxCare in June found that non-influenza vaccine rates among adults dropped dramatically as well during the COVID-19 pandemic, with rates down 83 percent for adults age 65 years and older and 60 percent for individuals age 19 to 49 years.

While vaccination rates stabilized somewhat last summer, once children returned to school in the fall, whether virtual or in-person, immunization rates again dropped off. Data released in November from Blue Cross and Blue Shield showed an estimated 26 percent decrease of those receiving the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) and the Diphtheria, Tetanus and Acellular Pertussis (DTaP) vaccines, while the Polio vaccine dropped 16 percent. More recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mirrors this trend and shows that as of January 3, overall VFC provider orders (other than flu) are down by more than 10.5 million doses compared to the previous year, with MMR/MMRV down by more than 1.3 million doses.

Unfortunately, this decline in immunizations threatens herd immunity levels, which provide protection in a community to those who cannot be vaccinated themselves, and raises the possibility of a secondary infectious disease outbreak during the pandemic. To ensure that children, adolescents,

and adults are still receiving routine immunizations, there needs to be continued and strengthened investment in the existing immunization delivery system and sustained messaging on the importance of receiving their recommended vaccines, particularly for children attending school. In fact, making sure children receive their ACIP-recommended vaccines will be key in ensuring that more schools can reopen safely. This is also important in addressing declining immunization rates in Black communities and other communities of color. As such, the undersigned organizations urge Congress to include the *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* in the next COVID-19 legislative package.

The Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act provides much needed funding to state and local public health departments to develop, scale, and evaluate local initiatives to boost vaccination rates during the COVID-19 pandemic. It would do so by strengthening partnerships with local stakeholders such as health care providers, schools, vaccine coalitions, and community-based organizations, disseminating culturally and linguistically appropriate information through communities and online social media platforms, and conducting outreach to promote health insurance options and immunization programs like Vaccines for Children, among other efforts.

While it is understandable that Congress is focused on the development and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine and immunizing as many Americans as possible against COVID-19, we cannot ignore the potential consequences of secondary outbreak of infectious disease during the pandemic. As such, we urge Congress to take immediate action to provide much needed funding to state and local public health departments to promote ACIP-recommended vaccinations during the COVID-19 public health emergency and include the *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* during the next COVID-19 legislative package.

Sincerely,

## **National Organizations**

AlDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Association on Health and Disability
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians
American Institute of Dental Public Health
American Lung Association
American Pediatric Society
American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Biotechnology Innovation Association (BIO)

Bridge the Gap – SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Specialty Care Coalition

Council of Administrators of Special Education

Council of Pediatric Subspecialties

Families Fighting Flu

Global Healthy Living Foundation

Hep B United

Hepatitis B Foundation

Immunization Action Coalition

Infectious Diseases Society of America

Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.

March of Dimes

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of School Nurses

National Birth Defects Prevention Network

National Coalition for Infant Health

National Consumers League

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases

National Meningitis Association

National Perinatal Association

National WIC Association

Nemours Children's Health System

**NICU Parent Network** 

Pediatric Endocrine Society

Pediatric Policy Council

PreemieWorld.com

School-Based Health Alliance

Society for Pediatric Research

The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation

The Mended Hearts, Inc.

Trust For America's Health

**Unity Consortium** 

Vaccinate Your Family

## State and Local Organizations

Alana's Foundation (Michigan)

Alliance for Immunizations in Michigan

Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Arizona Partnership for Immunization

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics

Children's Defense Fund (Texas)

Children's Wisconsin

Common Good Iowa

Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

**Ever Thrive Illinois** 

Family Voices New Jersey

Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Idaho Immunization Coalition

Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Indiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Iowa Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Immunize Nevada

Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Kentucky Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Langlade County Immunization Coalition (Wisconsin)

Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Michigan Allergy and Asthma Society

Michigan Association of Health Plans

Michigan Association of Osteopathic Family Physicians

Michigan Association of School Nurses

Michigan Chapter, American academy of Pediatrics

Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health

Michigan Council of Nurse Practitioners

Michigan Osteopathic Association

Michigan Pharmacists Association

Michigan State Medical Society

Mississippi Center for Justice

Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Montana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Nebraska Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Nevada Public Health Association

New Mexico Pediatric Society

New York Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics

New York Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics

New York Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics

New York Western Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
North Carolina Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
North Carolina Pediatric Society
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Oregon Pediatric Society
Rhode Island Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan
South Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
Tennessee Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
The Children's Agenda (New York)
The Emily Stillman Foundation (Michigan)
Utah Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics Wisconsin Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics