

April 16, 2021

The Honorable Kim Schrier
U.S. House of Representatives
1123 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Joyce
U.S. House of Representatives
1221 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable G.K. Butterfield
U.S. House of Representatives
2080 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David McKinley
U.S. House of Representatives
2239 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Schrier, Joyce, Butterfield, and McKinley,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we would like to share our support and thank you for introducing the *Strengthening the Vaccines for Children Program Act of 2021* (H.R. 2347).

Since its inception in 1993, the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program has increased vaccination rates across all races, ethnicities and income groups, and reduced racial and ethnic disparities.^{i,ii} The program provides federally purchased vaccines to approximately 50% of all children in the United States, with more than 80% administered in physicians' offices, allowing the trusted relationships within the medical home to identify vaccine gaps and to bolster vaccine confidence.

While the VFC program has been a tremendous success in providing vaccines at no cost to eligible children, current financial and administrative barriers make it difficult for pediatricians, family physicians and other clinicians to participate. For example, low payment rates that do not account for the time needed to counsel families and burdensome administrative requirements related to vaccine storage, refrigeration, and monitoring can dissuade practices from enrolling as VFC providers.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these pre-existing barriers. The pediatric vaccine delivery system, including pediatricians, family physicians, health centers, and others have faced serious financial challenges during the pandemic due to drops in utilization and increased costs of personal protective equipment (PPE), technology for telehealth, and overhead required for practice modifications for infection control. The dramatic drop in revenue compounded with higher costs has financially stressed many practices and has forced difficult changes including layoffs, reducing hours or closing clinic sites, cancelling vaccine orders, and other measures. Some are even considering capping or reducing the number of Medicaid patients in their panels or dropping VFC and/or Medicaid participation altogether.

We have also seen a troubling decrease in childhood immunizations over the course of the public health emergency. Data released in November from Blue Cross and Blue Shield showed an estimated 26% decrease of those receiving the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) and the Diphtheria, Tetanus and Acellular Pertussis (DTaP) vaccines, while the Polio vaccine dropped 16%.ⁱⁱⁱ More recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mirrors this trend and shows that as of March 21, 2021, overall VFC provider orders (other than flu) are down by more than 11.1 million doses compared to the previous year, with MMR/MMRV down by more than 1.4 million doses.^{iv} Children who cannot access vaccinations are left vulnerable to infectious diseases like measles and whooping cough and could leave their communities, particularly school settings, more vulnerable to outbreaks of other infectious diseases at the same time COVID-19 continues to spread.

Furthermore, children's Medicaid enrollment has increased by more than 10% over the past year as a result of pandemic-related job and income loss, making the demand for VFC providers more acute than ever.^v It is imperative that we bolster the pediatric vaccine delivery system immediately, both to address the gap in routine childhood immunizations as children and adolescents prepare to return to school, and to prepare for widespread administration of a COVID-19 vaccine once it is approved for use in pediatric populations.

As medical, public health, patient and education organizations, we strongly support the goals of the *Strengthening the Vaccines for Children Program Act of 2021*. Building on the successes of the VFC program, the legislation provides surge capacity responding to the pandemic and ensures long-term improvements in children's access to vaccinations. Of particular importance, the bill provides incentive payments for participating providers to stay in the program—and entice new providers to join—which can help cover start-up and operational costs. This bill also addresses providers' financial burden by increasing Medicaid payment for vaccine administration to match Medicare payment rates for two years.

The legislation would also make permanent programmatic changes to help strengthen the VFC program in the long run, including by extending VFC eligibility to children enrolled in Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP) and enabling underinsured children to receive VFC vaccines in their medical home. Additionally, the legislation would rectify a technical issue that currently prevents appropriate VFC payment for administration of multiple component vaccines, finally recognizing the additional time needed to counsel and educate families about vaccines.

We appreciate your commitment to ensuring high vaccination rates and to bolster the childhood vaccine delivery system and we are pleased to support the *Strengthening the Vaccines for Children Program Act of 2021*. We urge Congress to swiftly pass this legislation and we look forward to working with you to strengthen the Vaccines for Children program.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Academy of Neonatal Nursing
The AIDS institute
Alliance for Black NICU Families
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Association of Public Health Dentistry
American Association on Health and Disability
American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians
American Medical Association
American Medical Student Association
American Pediatric Association
American Pediatric Society
American Public Health Association
American Sexual Health Association
The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation
Association for Clinical Oncology
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs

Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Autism Science Foundation
Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)
Bridge the Gap – SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation
Cervivor, Inc.
Children’s Defense Fund
Coalition of Pediatric Subspecialties
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties
Families Fighting Flu
Family Voices
Franny Strong Foundation
Immunization Action Coalition
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis
The Kimberly Coffey Foundation
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
March of Dimes
Mended Little Hearts
Merck
National AHEC Organization
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health
National Association of EMS Physicians
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 League for Nursing
National Meningitis Association
National WIC Association
Nemours Children’s Health System
Novavax
Pediatric Endocrine Society
Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society
PremieWorld, LLC
School-Based Health Alliance
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics
Society for Pediatric Dermatology
Society for Pediatric Research
Society of Clinical Care Medicine
SPAN Patient Advocacy Network
Trust for America’s Health
United Way Worldwide
Vaccinate Your Family
Voices for Vaccines

State/Local Organizations

Advocate Aurora Health (Illinois)
Alabama Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Alana's Foundation (Michigan)
Alaska Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Alliance for Immunization in Michigan
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago
Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
The Arizona Partnership for Immunization
Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Arkansas Immunization Action Coalition (Immunize AR)
Best Start Washington
California Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Chapter 4, Orange County, American Academy of Pediatrics
California Children's Hospital Association
Chesapeake Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin
Children's Institute (Oregon)
Children's Specialty Care Coalition (California)
Children's Wisconsin
Colorado Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Connecticut Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
District of Columbia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Erie Family Health Centers (Illinois)
Ever Thrive Illinois
Family to Family Health Information Center of the Arc of Illinois
Family Voices New Jersey
Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Georgia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Goldsboro Pediatrics, PA (North Carolina)
Gundersen Health System (Wisconsin)
Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Hawaii Immunization Coalition
Idaho Immunization Coalition
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Illinois Public Health Association
Illinois Respiratory Health Association
Immunization Coalition of Delaware
Immunize Colorado
Immunize Nevada
Indiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Indiana Immunization Coalition
Iowa Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Kentucky Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Kentucky Immunization Coalition
Lakeshore Foundation (Alabama)
Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Massachusetts Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Michigan Academy of Family Physicians
Michigan Association of Osteopathic Family Physicians
Michigan Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan Council of Nurse Practitioners
Michigan Osteopathic Association
Michigan State Medical Society Alliance
Minnesota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Mississippi Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
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 Hampshire Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
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
Northern Michigan Vaccine Preventable Disease Task Force
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Ohio Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Oklahoma Caring Foundation
Oklahoma Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Orange County Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Oregon Pediatric Society
Our Children Oregon
Pennsylvania Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Pennsylvania Delaware Valley Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Pennsylvania Immunization Coalition
Respiratory Health Association
Rhode Island Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative
Salt Lake County Board of Health
South Carolina Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
South Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Team Maureen (Massachusetts)

Tennessee Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Texas Pediatric Society
United Way of Dunn County (Wisconsin)
Vaccinate California
Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Voices for Utah Children
Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
West Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Wisconsin Immunization Neighborhood
Wisconsin Medical Society
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Organization
Wyoming Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

ⁱ Brendan Walsh, Edel Doherty and Ciaran O'Neill, "Since the Start of the Vaccines for Children Program, Uptake Has Increased, And Most Disparities Have Decreased," Health Affairs, vol. 35, no. 2, February, 2016.

<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1019>

ⁱⁱ Allison T Walker, Philip J Smith, Maureen Kolasa, "Reduction of Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Vaccination Coverage, 1995-2011," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), April 18, 2014, 63(01): 7-12.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su6301a3.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Blue Cross Blue Shield. (2020, November 18). Missing vaccinations During covid-19 puts our children & communities at risk. Retrieved March 26, 2021, from <https://www.bcbs.com/the-health-of-america/infographics/missing-vaccinations-during-covid-19-puts-our-children-and-communities-at-risk>

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control, March 2021.

^v Georgetown Center for Children and Families. (2021, February 12). Child Medicaid Enrollment Grew by 10% during the Pandemic in 2020. <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2021/02/12/child-medicaid-enrollment-grew-by-10-during-pandemic-2020/>