

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.<sup>i,ii</sup> 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%.<sup>iii</sup> 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.<sup>iv</sup> 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.<sup>v</sup> 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

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<sup>i</sup> 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>

<sup>ii</sup> 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>

<sup>iii</sup> 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>

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control, March 2021.

<sup>v</sup> 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/>