

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to the health and wellbeing of the nation's children, pregnant women, and mothers, we write to request \$180 million in funding for the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program in the Senate Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill and to thank you for your longstanding commitment to this program over the last several years. We are especially appreciative of the additional \$15 million allocated by Congress in FY 2020 to ECHO for the continuation of the IDeA States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network.

From conception through adulthood, children grow and develop rapidly. It is increasingly understood that the environment in which they live—with its physical, chemical, biological, and psychosocial influences—has a significant impact on this development, as well as overall health and well-being. Furthermore, the health and development of the child is linked closely with that of the mother, and environmental factors play a crucial role in this context as well. We know that children are not simply “little adults” but have very different physiological responses to environmental influences than adults. The ECHO program at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is designed to investigate these influences to determine how they underpin the foundations of child health and how they impact an individual's long-term health. By answering crucial questions about the childhood antecedents of the costly diseases of adulthood, we can improve treatment, better prevent illness, and increase the health of the population across the lifespan.

The ECHO program funds research activities in more than 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico and brings together over 100 existing longitudinal cohort studies of children. By using studies already in place and that have already proven successful, the ECHO program is delivering important insights into child development quickly and efficiently. For instance, a recent ECHO study of 37,000 children found that overweight and obesity were more common in older children than in younger children and that Hispanic and black children had the highest rates of both overweight and obesity. The study pooled existing data from 70 longitudinal research projects to address research questions that no single cohort alone could answer, and the study authors note that ECHO's unique design will allow refined analyses to identify drivers of childhood obesity.

The ECHO program's IDeA States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network is focused on ensuring that children in rural and medically underserved locations can participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials. The network has sites in 17 states and utilizes states targeted by the NIH Institutional Development Awards (IDeA) Program, which is designed to broaden the geographic distribution of biomedical and behavioral research. This is not only making cutting-edge research accessible to more children and families across the country, but also ensuring that research reflects a broad spectrum of both environments and participants.

ECHO has partnered with the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to create the Advancing Clinical Trials in Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (ACT NOW) study to evaluate treatment options for newborns with neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, a condition caused by exposure to opioids during pregnancy. Part of the trans-NIH Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) initiative, ACT NOW is funding research to reduce the use of pharmacological agents in the treatment of children born exposed to opioids and to track long-term neurodevelopmental outcomes for these children.

We urge you to continue to support this important research initiative to improve the health of children and look forward to working with you to advance child health and well-being.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities  
American Pediatric Society  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Thoracic Society  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)  
Autism Society of America  
Endocrine Society  
Genetic Alliance  
Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI)  
March of Dimes  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Council on Family Relations  
National PKU Alliance  
Nemours Children's Health System  
Pediatric Policy Council  
PremieWorld, LLC  
PXE International  
Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention  
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

Society for Pediatric Research  
Society of Toxicology (SOT)  
United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation  
University of Montana