

December 4, 2020

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

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

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

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to bring to your attention an urgent situation that needs immediate Congressional action to help correct: a sustained decrease in immunization rates for recommended vaccines across all ages.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is a dramatic fall in immunization rates among children and adults. Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, the drop in childhood immunization rates was noted in the May 8 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), which reported that data obtained from the Vaccine Tracking System showed a significant decrease in orders for Vaccines for Children (VFC)-funded, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended non-influenza childhood vaccines and for measles-containing vaccines from January 6 through April 19, 2020, when compared to the same time period in 2019. A similar report in the May 18 MMWR noticed a steep decline in vaccination coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic in data supplied from the Michigan Care Improvement Registry.

An analysis from VaxCare in June also found that non-influenza vaccine rates among individuals of all ages dropped dramatically during COVID-19. This data showed that vaccination rates for adults age 65 years and older dropped an alarming 83 percent compared to last year, and in individuals age 19 to 49 years, there were declines of more than 60 percent.

Furthermore, in late May, a report on the *Impact of COVID-19 on Local Health Department Immunization Programs* assessment found that nearly 90 percent of respondents indicated that immunization programs and services were impacted by the COVID-19 response. The most frequently reported immunization activities included the provision of clinical services (83 percent), and most respondents (88 percent) indicated that program staff were re-assigned due to the local health department's need to respond to COVID-19. Notably, 17 percent indicated the need to re-direct funding from immunization program budgets to the COVID-19 response

While data shows that vaccination rates increased over the summer from their previous lows in the spring, they still have not rebounded to the previous year's level. In addition, as children returned to school in the fall, immunization rates have again fallen. New data just released from Blue Cross and Blue Shield show that there has been 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 has dropped 16 percent. As children return to school this winter, we must be vigilant in maintaining vaccination rates.

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 outbreak of infectious disease 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. 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* (S. 4737/H.R. 8061) in the next COVID-19 legislative package to develop, scale, and evaluate local initiatives to promote recommended vaccinations during this pandemic.

The *Community Immunity During COVID-19 Act* provides much needed funding to state and local public health departments to promote ACIP-recommended vaccinations during the COVID-19 public health emergency. It would do so by strengthening partnerships with local stakeholders such as health care providers and schools, disseminating information through online platforms including social media, and conducting outreach to promote health insurance options and immunization programs like Vaccines for Children, among other efforts. It would also fund the development and dissemination of vaccine counseling guidance for community immunization providers to be able to effectively communicate with patients about a COVID-19 vaccine once one has been approved.

In addition, to counter any role that vaccine hesitancy may be playing in families not staying up to date with the recommended vaccine schedule, we also encourage Congress to include the *VACCINES Act* (H.R. 2862) in the next COVID-19 legislative package. The *VACCINES Act* was needed prior to the current coronavirus outbreak—and the current pandemic makes this bill especially crucial now. This legislation seeks to support research to better understand vaccine hesitancy, spread public awareness of the importance of vaccinations through a national public awareness campaign, and increase vaccination rates across the lifespan. Due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, this legislation is needed now more than ever to help ensure fewer Americans are receptive to misinformation about the virus and any potential vaccine.

While it is understandable that Congress is focused on the promise of a COVID-19 vaccine, 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 to combat vaccine hesitancy that lowers the immunization rate for both routine vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines.

Sincerely,

### National Organizations

Academic Pediatric Association  
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & 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 Osteopathic Pediatricians  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Institute of Dental Public Health  
American Lung Association  
American Pediatric Society  
American Public Health Association  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations  
Association of Immunization Managers  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health  
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)  
Bridge the Gap – SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
Child Welfare League of America  
Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Hospital Association  
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  
International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis (AiArthritis)  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
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  
Nemours Children's Health System  
Organization of Teratology Information Specialists  
Pediatric Endocrine Society  
Pediatric Policy Council  
Pediatric Pulmonology Training Directors Association  
School-Based Health Alliance  
Society for Pediatric Research  
Society of Critical Care Medicine  
The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation  
The Mended Hearts, Inc.  
Trust for America's Health  
Unity Consortium  
Vaccinate Your Family

#### State and Local Organizations

Alliance for Immunization in Michigan  
Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Arizona Partnership for Immunization  
California Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics  
California Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Center for Developing Minds (California)  
Children's Defense Fund (Texas)  
Children's Specialty Care Coalition (California)  
Children's Wisconsin  
Common Good Iowa  
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Family Voices New Jersey  
Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Hep Free Hawaii  
Idaho Immunization Coalition  
Illinois 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, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
Michigan Academy of Family Physicians  
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health  
Michigan Osteopathic Association  
Minnesota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Mississippi Center for Justice  
Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Nebraska Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Nevada Academy of Family Physicians  
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Nevada Public Health Association  
New York State Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics  
New York State Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics  
New York University Langone Long Island Hospital  
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  
Pennsylvania Action Coalition  
Pennsylvania Delaware Valley Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
South Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Southeastern Pennsylvania Black Nurses Association  
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (New Jersey)  
Tennessee Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
The Children's Agenda (New York)  
The Emily Stillman Foundation (Michigan)  
Vaccinate California  
Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Wisconsin Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics