

February 1, 2013

Jeffrey Zients
Deputy Director for Management
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Zients:

On behalf of organizations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and adolescents, we write to you thank you for the Administration's previous support for the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program and ask for your continued support in the President's Fiscal Year 2014 budget. The number of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and pediatric mental health specialists today is inadequate to meet the growing health needs of America's children. We respectfully request that the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program, Section 775 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 295f), be recognized as a critical priority and strongly urge the Administration to request \$5 million for the program in Fiscal Year 2014.

There is not only a shortage but a significant disparity in the geographic distribution of pediatric subspecialists trained to treat children with special health care needs, resulting in many children in underserved rural and urban areas not receiving timely or appropriate health care. Children and their families often face long waiting lists to see subspecialists or must travel long distances to find needed care. Compounding the problem, fewer individuals are choosing careers in pediatric subspecialties and pediatric mental health care, while the existing workforce continues to age. Financial concerns, such as debt load, are a significant factor and a deterrent influencing career choice away from pediatric subspecialty.^{1,2} According to a 2012 survey conducted by the Children's Hospital Association, appointments for certain pediatric subspecialty care far exceed the prevailing benchmark of a two-week wait time in children's hospitals. For example, according to survey respondents, the average time for a developmental pediatric specialist is 14.5 weeks; 8.9 weeks for neurology; and 7.5 weeks for child and adolescent psychiatry. Children's hospitals also reported extended vacancies, 12 months or longer, for certain pediatric subspecialist positions, which contribute to the difficulty of accessing pediatric subspecialty care in a timely manner.³

The recent tragic events in Newtown, Connecticut also underscore the need to refocus attention on child and adolescent mental health. Unfortunately, however, there is a severe shortage of child and adolescent mental health care providers across the country. Without adequate availability of

¹ Frintner MP, Mulvey HJ, Pletcher BA, Olson LM. "Pediatric Resident Debt and Career Intentions." *Pediatrics*. 2013 Jan 6. [Epub ahead of print].

² Rochlin JM, Simon HK. "Does Fellowship Pay: What is the Long-Term Financial Impact of Subspecialty Training in Pediatrics?" *Pediatrics*. 2011 Feb;127(2):254-60.

³ Children's Hospital Association. "Pediatric Specialist Physician Shortages Affect Access to Care." August 2012. <http://www.childrenshospitals.net/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Surveys&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=63293>.

professionals trained to take care of youth with complex mental health problems, we cannot ensure that those who need care most are able to receive it.

The Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program will help ameliorate these shortages. Eligible participants must agree to work full-time for not less than two years in a pediatric medical specialty, a pediatric surgical specialty, or in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health in a health professional shortage area or a medically underserved area as determined by the Secretary. In return, the program will pay up to \$35,000 in loan repayment for each year of service, for a maximum of three years. The law authorizes \$30 million per year for loan repayments for pediatric medical specialists and pediatric surgical specialists and \$20 million for each year for loan repayments for child and adolescent mental and behavioral health professionals.

As you complete work on the President's Fiscal Year 2014 budget, we strongly urge you to recommend an appropriation within the Health Resources and Services Administration to provide initial funding for this program. Our nation desperately needs specialists specifically trained to treat the growing number of American children with serious physical and mental health conditions. It is vital that initial funding for this program be provided as soon as possible. Thank you for giving this request all appropriate consideration.

Sincerely,

AANS/CNS Section on Pediatric Neurological Surgery
Academic Pediatric Association
American Pediatric Society
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Otolaryngology
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American College of Cardiology
American College of Surgeons
American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology
American Society of Pediatric Neurosurgeons
American Thoracic Society
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Children's Hospital Association
Child Neurology Society
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition
Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America
Society for Pediatric Research