

May 6, 2024

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Capito, Chair Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As organizations that care deeply about the health and well-being of our nation's children, we write to request that you provide \$7 million in funding for the Pediatric Disaster Care Program within the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Labor, HHS, Education (LHHS) appropriations bill. **The majority of Americans believe children should be given a higher priority in disaster planning and response and we request that federal funding for public health preparedness and biodefense for children reflect that concern.**

The Pediatric Disaster Care Program (PDCP) was created in 2019 to ensure regional capabilities and capacity to meet children's unique physical and mental health care needs during a disaster, pandemic, or public health event. Children account for 25% of the US population and have unique vulnerabilities in a disaster. Therefore, pediatric care requires specialized training, equipment, supplies, and pharmaceuticals that may not be readily available in an emergency. As a result, minimizing the impacts of children's exposure to infectious diseases, trauma, and other hazards is a challenge for healthcare facilities and stresses the ability of the healthcare system to respond.

Disruptions in their care, trauma, social isolation, financial insecurity, food and housing insecurity, and grief associated with a natural disaster or pandemic can have a significant negative impact on children's mental and physical health and their long-term well-being. This is especially true for children and families in underserved, under-resourced, and racial and ethnic minority communities. The PDCP has played a vital role, since its inception, in bolstering regional systems of care to support children and families during disasters or other public health emergencies.

The PDCP currently funds three Pediatric Disaster Care Centers of Excellence (CoEs), bringing together children's hospitals, private and public entities, and national organizations to disseminate best practices in pediatric disaster preparedness and response on a regional level. The Gulf 7-Pediatric Disaster Network (G7), covers six U.S. states – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas – and Puerto Rico. The Western Regional Alliance for Pediatric Emergency Management (WRAP-EM) covers Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Utah. Region V for Kids covers Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin respectively.

A specific focus of the CoEs has been the management of pediatric care related to trauma, infectious diseases including pandemic influenza, COVID-19, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), burn, and chemical/biological/radiological/nuclear incidents. The role of the CoEs is particularly critical for addressing care capacity in light of a 13% reduction in inpatient pediatric beds nationwide. Funding in FY25 is essential to enhancing regional capacity to provide critical care and surgical care for sick or injured children within the existing three regional sites as well as in other regions of the U.S.

The three Pediatric CoEs funded under this program are addressing appropriate planning and response capabilities that support the unique needs of children during public health emergencies and disasters. The CoEs are developing coordinated pediatric care plans in their region, improving statewide medical surge capacity for pediatric care, educating and training the healthcare and medical workforce on preparedness and response gaps related to pediatric patients, and conducting regional exercises. They were a crucial component of the federal government's response to the 2022-2023 surge of respiratory illnesses by convening town halls of health care providers, which ensured the appropriate allocation of resources, and producing a pediatric surge playbook to provide response strategies and support resources.

Pandemic and disaster preparedness efforts throughout the public and private sector must be aligned, coordinated, strengthened, and adequately funded to support a shared pediatric mission and framework. The CoEs are a vital element of that framework ensuring the broader capacity of the nation's medical facilities to meet children's basic physical and mental health needs—as well as those of their entire caregiving/support system—through the enhancement of appropriate training and providing other child-centric resources.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge you to provide \$7 million in funding for this important program and look forward to working with you to improve disaster preparedness for children across our nation.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Pediatric Society
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Children's Hospital Association
Children's Minnesota
Children's Wisconsin
Cincinnati Children's
Emergency Nurses Association
Family Voices
Health Support Team, LLC
National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT)
National Association of EMS Physicians
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials

National League for Nursing
Pediatric Policy Council
Society for Pediatric Research
Texas Children's Hospital
The Lundquist Institute for Biomedical Innovation at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Paramedic Foundation
Trust for America's Health
University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's
Western Regional Alliance for Pediatric Emergency Management (WRAPEM)