April 7, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi Speaker of the House United States House of Representatives 1236 Longworth House Office Building Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell Majority Leader United States Senate 317 Russell 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

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

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

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we would like to share our support for including the *Vaccine Awareness Campaign to Champion Immunization Nationally and Enhance Safety* (*VACCINES*) *Act of 2019*, (H.R. 2862), in the next legislative vehicle to respond to the coronavirus crisis.

We are extremely grateful that Congress has enacted several measures to aid the nation in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one area that we feel must still be addressed is the need for robust uptake of a COVID-19 vaccine once available and ready for the general public. One potential barrier to that uptake is hesitancy of people to get the vaccine because of misinformation or disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine or vaccines in general.

Vaccine hesitancy has been on the rise recently in the United States and increases in measles cases has been a direct result. From January 1 to December 31, 2019, there were 1,282 individual cases of measles confirmed in 31 states across the United States. This was the highest number of confirmed cases reported nationally since 1992, despite measles being declared eliminated in the United States in 2000. More than 73% of the cases last year were linked to outbreaks in New York, and the majority were found in people who were not vaccinated against measles. Infectious diseases like measles are more likely to spread and cause outbreaks in communities where people are unvaccinated.

The rise in the number of unvaccinated children and adults around the country is largely due to a surge in the spread of vaccine misinformation and vaccine hesitancy, which the World Health Organization (WHO) deemed one of the ten biggest threats to global health in 2019. The *VACCINES Act* is a critical step in combatting vaccine hesitancy and misinformation and ensuring that there is continued public awareness of the importance of vaccinations.

Unfortunately, despite the seriousness of the spread of COVID-19, there is a large amount of misinformation being spread about the coronavirus and an eventual vaccine for it. Groups that

oppose vaccination requirements have bombarded social media with posts that downplay the risks of COVID-19, promote discredited conspiracy theories about the virus, and criticize efforts to control the spread of the virus.

As medical, public health, patient and education organizations, we strongly supported the goals of the *VACCINES Act* prior to the current coronavirus outbreak—and the current pandemic makes this bill especially crucial. This legislation seeks to support research to better understand vaccine hesitancy, spread public awareness of the importance of vaccinations, 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.

The bill authorizes the development of a national vaccination rate surveillance system at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and allows data collected to be used to identify communities with low vaccination utilization or where vaccine misinformation may be targeted. It also authorizes research grants to better understand vaccine hesitancy, attitudes towards vaccines, and develop strategies to address nonadherence to the recommended use of vaccines.

Additionally, the bill authorizes an evidence-based public awareness campaign on the importance of vaccinations that would aim to increase vaccination rates and can be targeted at communities that have particularly low vaccination levels. This public awareness campaign could be particularly useful to encourage people to get a COVID-19 vaccine once it becomes available. Grants authorized in the legislation may be awarded to State, local, and tribal health departments to engage communities with lower than average vaccination rates, better understand challenges to increasing vaccination rates in these communities and develop community partnerships to deliver evidence-based interventions to raise vaccination rates. In order to successfully prevent future outbreaks, these grants must be robustly funded to effectively engage communities with lower vaccination rates.

We appreciate your previous response to the COVID-19 crisis. Because of your commitment to ensuring high vaccination rates, we respectfully urge you to include the *VACCINES Act* as part of the next legislative response to the coronavirus outbreak. We look forward to working with you to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus, improve the vaccination rate across the lifespan, and prevent future outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Academic Pediatric Association AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families American Academy of Pediatrics American Association of Immunologists American Association of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus American Association of Public Health Dentistry

American Association on Health and Disability

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians

American College of Physicians

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Medical Student Association

American Nurses Association

American Pediatric Society

American Pediatric Surgical Association

American Pharmacists Association

American Physical Therapy Association

American Public Health Association

American Public Health Laboratories

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Association of Immunization Managers (AIM)

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Autism Science Foundation

Bridge the Gap – SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation

Cervivor, Inc.

Childhood Arthritis & Rheumatology Research Alliance (CARRA)

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Hospital Association

Council of Pediatric Subspecialties

Families Fighting Flu

First Candle

First Focus Campaign for Children

Global Healthy Living Foundation

Hep B United

Hepatitis B Foundation

Immunization Action Coalition

Kimberly Coffey Foundation

Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.

Mended Little Hearts

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

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

North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology

Organization of Teratology Information Specialists

Pediatric Endocrine Society

Pediatric Policy Council

Pediatric Pulmonology Training Directors Association

PKIDS

PreemieWorld, LLC

RetireSafe

RetireSafe Foundation

School-Based Health Alliance

Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine

Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention

Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

Society for Pediatric Research

Society for Public Health Education

Society of Critical Care Medicine

The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation

The Children's Agenda

The Franny Strong Foundation

The Immunization Partnership

The Jewish Federations of North America

Trust for America's Health

Unity Consortium

Vaccine Ambassadors

Vaccinate Your Family

State and Local Organizations

Alabama Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Alana's Foundation (Michigan)

Alliance for Immunizations in Michigan

American Academy of Pediatrics, California District IX

Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Arizona Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Arkansas Immunization Action Coalition

California Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Chapter 4, American Academy of Pediatrics

California Children's Hospital Association

California Immunization Coalition

California Los Angeles Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

California Orange County Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

California San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Children's Defense Fund – Texas

Children's Wisconsin

Coalition of Texans with Disabilities

Colorado Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.

Community Health Choice (Texas)

Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Florida Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Florida PITCH – Partners Immunizing Toward Community Health

Georgia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Georgia Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Greater New York Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Hawaii Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center

Hawaii Immunization Coalition

Hep Free Hawaii

Idaho Immunization Coalition

Immunization Collaboration of Tarrant County

Immunization Task Force of Metro Omaha

Immunize Colorado

Immunize Kansas Coalition

Immunize Nevada

Immunize Ohio

Immunize Tennessee

Indiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Indiana Immunization Coalition

Iowa Association of Nurse Practitioners

Iowa Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Langlade County Immunization Coalition (Wisconsin)

Louisiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Louisiana Vaccine Alliance

Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland Chesapeake Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Massachusetts Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Michigan Academy of Family Physicians

Michigan Allergy & Asthma Society

Michigan Association for Local Public Health

Michigan Association of Health Plans

Michigan Association of Osteopathic Family Physicians

Michigan Association of School Nurses

Michigan Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health

Michigan Council of Nurse Practitioners

Michigan Osteopathic Association

Michigan Pharmacists Association

Michigan State Medical Society

Michigan State Medical Society Alliance

Minnesota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Minnesota Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Mississippi Center for Justice

Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Montana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Nevada Academy of Family Physicians

Nevada Public Health Association

Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Nevada State Medical Association

New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

New York State Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics

New York State Chapter 2, American Academy of Pediatrics

New York State Chapter 3, American Academy of Pediatrics

North Carolina Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

North Carolina Immunization Coalition

North Carolina Pediatric Society

North Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Northern Michigan Vaccine Preventable Disease Task Force

Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Oklahoma Alliance for Healthy Families

Oklahoma Caring Foundation

Oklahoma Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Oklahoma Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Oregon Pediatric Society

Pennsylvania Delaware Valley Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Pennsylvania Three Rivers Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Pennsylvania Immunization Coalition

San Francisco Immunization Coalition

San Joaquin Valley Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Sioux Falls Area Immunization Coalition

South Carolina Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

South Carolina Parents for Vaccines

South Texas Alamo Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Team Maureen (Massachusetts)

Texas Association of Community Health Plans

Texas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers

The Emily Stillman Foundation (Michigan)

Tulsa Area Immunization Coalition

Utah Chapter, American academy of Pediatrics

Utah Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Vaccinate California

Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Vermont Pharmacists Association

Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Washington Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

West Virginia Immunization Network

West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association

Western New York Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Wisconsin Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Wisconsin Chapter, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

Wyoming Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics