

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 Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn 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 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

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 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 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
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 Pulmonology Training Directors Association
PKIDS
PremieWorld, 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 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
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