October 22, 2019

Honorable Eliot Engel
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
1035 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Reps. Engel and McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of our member hospitals and the children and families they serve, we write to express our support for H.R. 4519, the “Pediatricians Accelerate Childhood Therapies Act of 2019,” also known as the PACT Act. This legislation will lead to improved care for our nation’s children by bolstering programs at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support the development of the next generation of pediatric researchers.

A robust pediatric physician research workforce—including physician-scientists—is essential to treating and finding cures for the millions of American children fighting a disease. Furthermore, discoveries in pediatric research have broad impacts across the health care spectrum. Critically, however, additional support is needed to maintain this vital research pipeline. The number of slots available through NIH pediatrician-focused research training programs has declined in recent years. This includes a reduction of the Child Health Research Awards—from 88 trainees in 2011 to just 36 today—and a reduction in Pediatric Scientist Development Award training slots—from 17 per institution as of 2017 to just 10 per institution today. Troublingly, the percentage of physicians focusing a portion of their careers on research has also declined. The field of pediatrics is especially challenged when it comes to mentors for physician-scientists, including mentors who reflect the diversity of today’s early-career pediatric researchers.

The PACT Act recognizes the challenges associated with attracting and retaining early-career researchers—particularly physician-scientists—to careers in pediatric research and establishes a new program to address these impediments. This legislation would establish an NIH-wide grant to support early-career pediatric researchers. Grant recipients would be allowed to focus on any aspect of pediatric research, from basic discovery to clinical and translational research. This legislation would also direct NIH to work with pediatric stakeholders to identify specific areas of need, including those aligned with existing NIH pediatric research goals and emerging needs.

We applaud the introduction of this bill and your bipartisan commitment to advancing the state of health care for children. We look forward to Congress moving forward on this legislation.

Sincerely,

M. James Kaufman
Vice President, Public Policy
Children’s Hospital Association

Champions for Children’s Health