

June 24, 2024

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS
U.S. House of Representatives
266 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS
U.S. House of Representatives
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS
U.S. Senate
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS
U.S. Senate
170 Russell House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to the health and well-being of the nation's children, pregnant women, and mothers, we write to request \$207 million in funding for the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program in your Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bills.

The ECHO program, supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is designed to understand the effects of a broad range of early environmental influences on maternal and child health and development. The ECHO program is focused on five areas of children's health: pregnancy and birth, breathing, body weight, brain development and well-being.

With the additional funding requested, ECHO will be able to collect deeper data, address more questions on timely topics such as how social media affects child health and well-being. ECHO would be better able to include the prepregnancy period in ECHO Cohort research, address maternal morbidity, and include more participants from underserved communities, such as Indigenous populations and participants in rural communities. It would also allow for greater data sharing capacity.

We also would like to express our support of the proposed transfer of the ECHO program from the Immediate Office of the NIH Director to the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) within the Office of the Director at NIH. This transfer, subject to congressional approval, would allow for enhanced collaboration and greater scientific interchange.

ECHO's activities include more than 180 health care institutions and over 1,200 researchers in 44 states who are dedicated to learning what factors affect child health and finding ways to enhance it through observational and interventional research that can inform health care practices, community health programs, and health policies. By answering crucial questions about the childhood antecedents of the costly diseases of adulthood, we can improve treatment, better prevent illness, and increase the health of the population across the lifespan.

Additionally, the ECHO program's IDeA States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network provides children in rural and medically underserved locations the opportunity to participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials. The

network supports 87 Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) and 24 IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) sites in 23 states and targets those states identified by the NIH Institutional Development Awards (IDeA) Program that are designed to broaden the geographic distribution of biomedical and behavioral research.

Since 2016, more than 1,200 ECHO Cohort researchers at more than 180 institutions have collaborated to weave data from 69 pre-existing longitudinal maternal-child health studies into a single national resource. Data from more than 107,000 child and parent participants in the ECHO Cohort have powered more than 1,200 peer-reviewed articles across five pediatric areas of high public health impact: pre-, peri- and postnatal health; upper and lower airways; obesity; neurodevelopment; and positive health.

During the last two years, ECHO-funded researchers have continued to advance our understanding of the ways that environmental influences impact maternal and child health and well-being. In one example, ECHO awarded a multidisciplinary group of researchers from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Penn Medicine to uncover how environmental exposures during prepregnancy, pregnancy and early life affect children's long-term health. The project will help shed light on the extent to which health inequities seen in the patient population are related to neighborhood environmental exposures.

A second ECHO-funded study is analyzing the impact of life changes on mothers during the pandemic and their impact on the reported symptoms of traumatic stress. Yet another ECHO-funded longitudinal study at the University of Oregon will determine whether there are developmental periods during which recovery from earlier environmental exposures is most possible, as well as whether positive aspects of a child's environment can provide a buffer against exposure to a negative environmental event or context earlier in their development.

With funding made available by Congress, ECHO has awarded a first year of the second seven-year cycle of the ECHO Cohort Consortium. From September 2023 through May 2030, the ECHO Cohort Consortium will follow more than 30,000 current ECHO Cohort child and adolescent participants and their families, while adding more than 30,000 new pregnant participants and their offspring. In addition, researchers will follow at least 10,000 women and, when available, their partners, to examine how prepregnancy exposures may influence child health outcomes. The enhanced ECHO Cohort will include about 60,000 total children and adolescents by 2030. Following this large and diverse population will enhance ECHO's ability to answer solution-oriented questions about the effects of a broad range of early environmental exposures, from society to biology, on child health and development.

Thank you for your longstanding and continued commitment to this vital child research program. We urge you to continue to support the important research through ECHO to improve the health of children and look forward to working with you to advance this request.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Autism Science Foundation
Children's Environmental Health Network
Coalition for Pediatric Medical Research

Cribs for Kids, Inc.
Endocrine Society
First Candle
Genetic Alliance
March of Dimes
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Council on Family Relations
National League for Nursing
National Women's Health Network
Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC) Society
Organic Acidemia Association
PXE International
Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention
Society for Reproductive Investigation
Society of Toxicology

CC:

The Honorable Patty Murray (D-WA)
The Honorable Susan Collins (R-ME)
The Honorable Tom Cole (R-OK)