

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole:

We write to express our strong support of an appropriations request for a significant increase in funding for the front-line providers of health care to nation's most vulnerable children and youth – our school-based health centers (SBHCs).

Over the past fifteen months, our nation has been confronted with a health care crisis of previously unimaginable scale. Coronavirus infections, hospitalizations and deaths have hit each and every community. Among the many revelations from this pandemic is the now broadly held understanding that serious fundamental inequities exist when it comes to health care, particularly among children from low-income households in grossly underserved urban and rural communities. Those inequities lead to poorer health, higher mortality rates and myriad related issues that can impact these children throughout their lives.

As Congress considers how best to address these gaps in care, we encourage you to increase your investment in a proven approach – school-based health centers. At present, the more than 2,500 school-based health centers provide children in our poorest communities with access to primary, behavioral, dental health care, and vision services, along with substance abuse counseling, nutrition education, health education, case management, and health-promotion activities where they spend the majority of their time – at school.

Comprehensive research has demonstrated that these services improve health and education outcomes to form a foundation in order to address these inequities. The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF), an independent, non-federal panel of public health and prevention experts established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recommends the implementation and maintenance of school-based health centers in low-income communities to improve education and health outcomes.

Since the onset of the pandemic, school-based health centers have continued to provide care both in-person, when possible, as well as increasingly through telehealth services. School-based health centers are also playing a critical role in vaccinating children as their families prepare for a full year of school beginning this summer and fall. Additionally, this past year has been traumatic for kids, and the demand for behavioral health services is spiking to historic levels. School-based health centers can and do meet this critical need.

Unfortunately, there is a huge population of our most vulnerable children who currently do not have access to a school-based health centers – of the nation's 23,000 Title I schools, only about 2,500 host or partner with sponsors to operate school-based health centers, leaving students in over 20,000 schools without access to these critical services. The reason for the lack is largely due to the limits of available funding. In fact, in FY21, the Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA) received \$5 million to expand school-based health centers and services, but more than 300 potential sponsors applied for only 25 available grants.

As national partners of the School-Based Health Alliance, which supports our nation's SBHCs, we urge Congress to increase funding to establish new and expand existing school-based health centers across America. Specifically, we call on Congress to increase funding for two programs, which will provide funds for both Federal-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and non-FQHC sponsors of SBHCs:

- Increase FY21 funding from \$5MM to \$100MM for SBHCs in the Section 330 Health Centers Program at HRSA (for FQHC sponsors).
- Create a new \$100MM program within the Bureau of Primary Health at HRSA (for non-FQHC sponsors).

The combined \$200MM will support the establishment of new school-based health centers and expand services at between 500 and 1,000 centers in FY22. As Congress reviews President Biden's FY22 budget and begins the FY22 appropriations process, we ask you to carefully consider school-based health centers as a critically important partner in the effort to address inequities in our health care system and protect the most vulnerable children throughout our country. As trusted and familiar providers to students and families, school-based health centers are uniquely equipped to be successful in this challenge.

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