

March 19, 2008

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health & Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health & Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Walsh:

As your Subcommittee prepares to mark up the Fiscal Year 2009 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations bill, we respectfully request \$802.5 million for the national immunization program authorized under section 317 of the Public Health Service Act at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This year, CDC submitted a report to Congress estimating that \$1.1 billion is needed to provide recommended vaccines to eligible children, adolescents, and adults.

The section 317 immunization program provides essential funding to state and local health departments for vaccinating children, adolescents, and adults. It ensures that children who are not eligible for the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, and who cannot otherwise afford immunization, can be vaccinated. The majority of the 317 program funds are used by states to conduct routine childhood immunization programs, with a smaller portion remaining for adolescent and adult immunization programs. Therefore, despite high vaccination rates among pre-school-aged children, adolescent and adult vaccination rates remain considerably lower and racial and ethnic disparities persist.

The CDC report to Congress clearly illustrates that the section 317 program is not receiving sufficient funding to carry out its essential public health mission. We need our nation's population to be well-vaccinated so that they are less vulnerable to the risks of preventable diseases. Our request would ensure access to cost-effective prevention measures. For every dollar invested to provide the seven recommended pediatric vaccines, society saves \$16.50 in direct and indirect costs. This results in billions of dollars in savings from the 317 program alone.

Thank you for your past leadership and support of efforts to extend access to life-saving vaccines for children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults.

Sincerely,

Leonard L. Boswell
Member of Congress

John Shimkus
Member of Congress