

May 6, 2009

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 Todd Tiahrt  
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 Tiahrt:

As organizations committed to protecting the health of children and adults, we recommend increasing federal discretionary funding for the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (formerly the National Immunization Program) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), commonly known as "section 317" of the Public Health Service Act. We urge you to provide \$802.5 million in the fiscal year 2010 Labor, HHS Appropriations Bill for this critical program.

This program provides vaccines for children from working families who do not qualify for the federal entitlement program, Vaccines for Children (VFC), as well as for adolescents and adults who do not otherwise have access to vaccines. Section 317 funds are used to purchase and administer vaccines, conduct surveillance, communicate with the public and providers, and provide education.

The FY 2009 Omnibus spending bill provided \$495.9 million for the Section 317 program, a \$30 million increase over the FY08 funding level of \$465.9 million. In addition, Congress provided a supplemental \$300 million within the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which will act as one-time money spent over the next two years. State and local health departments will use the ARRA funds to provide increased access to vaccines for children and adults, including conducting targeted programs for school-based vaccination. Nevertheless, this new level of funding will not be continued unless Congress provides additional resources in FY 2010. A March 2009 CDC report to Congress estimated that \$1.6 billion in Section 317 funding will be needed to fully protect all of the children eligible under this program for vaccines, and to enhance the adolescent and adult programs, making the need for sustained increases critical.

Over 46,000 people in the U.S. die annually of vaccine-preventable diseases and hundreds of thousands more are hospitalized. Influenza accounts for approximately 36,000 of these deaths. The top 3 causes of vaccine preventable deaths in adults are influenza, pneumonia and hepatitis B.

Vaccines have been hailed as one of the most cost-effective public health measures, saving 35,000 lives and preventing 14 million cases of disease among each birth cohort. Vaccines have saved the lives of millions of people worldwide, yet they continue to be undervalued and under-funded year after year. The 317 Program ensures that children who cannot otherwise afford immunization can be vaccinated, and provides some access to vaccinations for uninsured and underinsured adolescents and adults. It is also our public health system's primary source of funding for building a solid immunization infrastructure, which is needed for today's vaccines and will be relied upon in the event of an influenza pandemic or other bioterrorist event.

Please join us in ensuring that all individuals have access to life-saving vaccines.

Sincerely,