

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Service, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray,

I write on behalf of the Friends of NICHD, a coalition of professional societies and patient advocacy groups with a vested interest in promoting and sustaining the vital research activities of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). We thank you for including supplemental research funds for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other agencies in recently enacted legislation to respond to the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

While we were pleased Congress provided new funding to support the NIH and many of its institutes and centers as they work through the unique challenges – and research opportunities – presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we were disappointed not to see specific support for the critical work of the NICHD. We urge you, as you contemplate and craft follow-up relief measures, not to overlook the critical work and funding needs of the NICHD.

As you are aware, the NICHD has made extraordinary achievements in meeting the objectives of its biomedical, social, and behavioral research mission, including research on pregnancy; reproductive biology; women’s health throughout the life cycle; maternal, child, and family health; learning and language development; population health; and medical rehabilitation. Moreover, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have each articulated the increased risk COVID-19 is for people with disabilities. NICHD is well equipped with a network of researchers including IDDRCs to address the impact of COVID-19 on these high-risk populations. The Friends of NICHD supports an appropriation of \$1.6 billion for in Fiscal Year 2021, an increase of \$112 million over FY 2020.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) included \$945.4 million for the NIH to “prevent, prepare for, or respond to coronavirus, domestically or internationally.” It also provided specific appropriations to support related work at NIH components including the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHBLI), National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB), the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), and National Library of Medicine (NLM). Unfortunately, NICHD, which will play a pivotal role in the work to understand the short and long-term impacts of

COVID-19 on maternal and infant health, child development, and in specific populations, has not received supplemental funding for this work. We call on Congress to act to ensure that NICHD receives designated support for its work in the next COVID relief package.

Despite the lack of new funds, NICHD is an active participant in the COVID-19 response at NIH. The NICHD has been an active participant in NIH Institute and Center-wide discussions on the topic, including working to ensure that NICHD's populations are included in COVID-19 related research (e.g. vaccine and therapeutic clinical trials). Additionally, NICHD's experts are exploring options to repurpose funds to support a pregnancy registry to better understand maternal and neonatal outcomes for pregnant people with COVID-19 and their infants. Moreover, NICHD is supporting efforts to leverage the trans-NIH Pediatric Research Consortium (N-PeRC) to cultivate pediatric and obstetric research ideas and collaboration in the wake of COVID-19.

NICHD is taking on these key efforts even as it maintains a robust and critical research portfolio, which addresses topics including, but not limited to: maternal mortality; infant and childhood health; behavioral health; poverty and child health; reproductive sciences; healthy pregnancies; and human development from infancy through adulthood.

We write with urgency to respectfully request that the unparalleled research portfolio and programs of the NICHD are addressed in forthcoming relief packages as we collectively work to anticipate and meet the challenges and learning opportunities presented by the COVID-19 crisis. While we are hopeful that NICHD will benefit from the funding that has been appropriated to support the NIH Office of the Director, we are not comfortable resting on hope alone and thus call on you to act to support the NICHD at this critical time. Importantly, we also support the inclusion of funding for scientific and medical researchers in the next relief package.

Thank you for your leadership during this extraordinary time and for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RWCa", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rebecca W. O'Connor

2020 Chair, Friends of the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
Government Affairs Manager
American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)