January 21, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Fred Upton
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Chairman Hatch, Ranking Member Wyden, Speaker Boehner, Minority Leader Pelosi, Chairman Upton and Ranking Member Pallone:

As health care providers and advocates focused on the health of children and pregnant women, we look forward to working together with you throughout the new Congress to ensure our nation's continued progress toward improved health coverage and access to appropriate pediatric care for the nation's 78 million children. As you set priorities for the days and weeks ahead, we urge you to make children your first priority by extending funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for four more years as soon as possible.

One of the greatest bipartisan achievements for children was the 1997 creation of CHIP under a Republican-controlled Congress and a Democrat-controlled White House. For nearly two decades, CHIP has been an essential source of coverage for working families. It ensures access to high-quality, affordable, pediatric-appropriate health care for children in families whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to purchase private health insurance, as well as providing access to prenatal care and other health services to pregnant women to ensure improved birth outcomes. Even during the recession and while child poverty was on the rise, CHIP contributed significantly to our nation's landmark achievement of cutting the children's uninsurance rate by half, reducing the percentage of uninsured children in the U.S. to an all-time low.

Without congressional action, federal CHIP funding will expire this fall, forcing millions of children and hundreds of thousands of pregnant women off their health insurance plans. While many of these individuals may be able to find coverage through Medicaid or insurance exchanges, the expiration of CHIP would leave many children's coverage disrupted and up to 2 million uninsured. This would reverse the progress made over the past two decades and create a coverage gap among children and pregnant women in working families. The vast majority of governors—at least 40—share our concerns about CHIP

expiring abruptly. Many governors have also raised concerns about higher cost sharing and inadequate benefits for children moving from CHIP to alternative sources of coverage, state fiscal challenges in financing children's coverage in the absence of CHIP, and the increased number of uninsured children if CHIP funding expires. Put simply, CHIP works and must be extended to avoid an unacceptable return to higher rates of child uninsurance.

For these reasons, we urge you to prioritize children's health by extending CHIP for four more years immediately. Governors from across the country and diverse political persuasions are asking Congress to act "as soon as possible" to allow for regular order in their state budgetary processes, many of which are already well under way. It is vital for states to have certainty about the future of CHIP funding as they develop their fiscal year 2016 budgets and negotiate contracts with insurers and providers. Delays while the states are making these plans could lead to unnecessary uncertainty, costs for the states and federal government, and real difficulties for American families. For example, as we learned in 2007, states may be under statutory requirements to inform families well in advance of terminating coverage options and placing eligible children on waiting lists. It is critical that Congress secure CHIP's future before states begin disenrolling children and pregnant women from stable coverage. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you extend CHIP on a bipartisan basis at the very first opportunity this year.

CHIP has been remarkably successful at covering children and pregnant women in working families for nearly two decades, and time is running short to extend it. On behalf of nearly 10 million children and 370,000 pregnant women depending on CHIP, we urge you to put kids and moms first. We ask that you act immediately to stabilize the CHIP funding stream to ensure that children's and pregnant women's coverage will be protected.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Children's Dental Health Project
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Hospital Association
Community Catalyst
Families USA
Family Voices
First Focus
March of Dimes
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Health Law Program
United Way Worldwide