

May 17, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and Related
Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Granger, Chair Aderholt, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to the health and well-being of the nation's children, pregnant women, and mothers, we write to request \$180 million in funding for the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program in the House Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill and to thank you for your longstanding commitment to this program over the last several years.

From conception through adulthood, children grow and develop rapidly. It is increasingly understood that the environment in which they live—with its physical, chemical, biological, and psychosocial influences—has a significant impact on this development, as well as overall health and well-being. Furthermore, the health and development of the child is linked closely with that of the mother, and environmental factors play a crucial role in this context as well. We know that children are not simply “little adults” but have very different physiological responses to environmental influences than adults.

The ECHO program at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is designed to understand the effects of a broad range of early environmental influences on maternal and child health and development. ECHO is dedicated to both learning what factors affect child health and to finding ways to enhance it through observational and interventional research that can inform health care practices, community health programs, and health policies. By answering crucial questions about the childhood antecedents of the costly diseases of adulthood, we can improve treatment, better prevent illness, and increase the health of the population across the lifespan.

The ECHO program employs a unique model that brings together successful longitudinal studies already in place. ECHO leverages more than 69 existing longitudinal cohort studies of children to allow researchers to study the impacts of environmental influences on a diverse array of children over time. Separately, the ECHO program's IDEa States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network provides children in rural and medically underserved locations the opportunity to participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials. The network has sites in 18 states and targets those states identified by the NIH Institutional Development

Awards (IDeA) Program, which is designed to broaden the geographic distribution of biomedical and behavioral research. In all, the ECHO program funds research activities in more than 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

ECHO-funded researchers continue to advance our understanding of the ways that environmental influences impact maternal and child health and well-being. For instance, one ECHO-funded study compared over 20,000 prenatal vitamins available in the U.S. to help inform pregnant people and health care providers about which supplements will help them get the key nutrients they need in their diets. Findings from one ECHO study of more than 4,000 mothers and their children suggest that the children of mothers who themselves experienced child maltreatment may in turn experience poorer health outcomes, including diagnoses of asthma, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and symptoms linked to depression. Yet another ECHO-funded study found that higher concentrations of PFAS, chemicals used in a wide range of consumer products, in the blood of pregnant women were more likely to have babies born with lower birthweight. These are just a few of the important questions ECHO is examining.

We urge you to continue to support this important research initiative to improve the health of children and look forward to working with you to advance child health and well-being.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
Alliance for Black NICU Families
Alström Syndrome International
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Pediatric Society
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Autism Science Foundation
CDH International
Crystal Ball Health, LLC
Endocrine Society
Genetic Alliance
GLO Premies
International Foundation for CDKL5 Research
March of Dimes
MLD Foundation
National Council on Family Relations
National PKU Alliance
National PKU News
Organic Acidemia Association
Pediatric Policy Council
PremieWorld.com
Profound Autism Alliance
PXE International
RASopathies Network
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

Society for Pediatric Research
Society of Toxicology (SOT)
University of Montana
Wilson Disease Association