May XX, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chair Capito, and Ranking Member Baldwin:

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 thank you for your continued bipartisan support of the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) program and request $180 million in funding for ECHO in the Senate Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

The ECHO program, within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is designed to understand the effects of a broad range of early environmental influences on child health and development, including socioeconomic status, family support, biological factors, nutrition, and physical and chemical exposures. ECHO research is centered on five outcome areas of child health: pregnancy and birth, breathing, body weight, brain development, and well-being. By answering crucial questions about how various early-life influences shape the health outcomes of adulthood, the ECHO program plays a vital role in addressing the serious challenges of chronic disease in children and advancing the health and well-being of America's young people.

The ECHO Cohort, the largest longitudinal child health study in the U.S., includes over 130,000 participants, including more than 64,000 children. ECHO Cohort observational studies look at information about these participants' everyday lives to understand the factors that influence children's health over time. Separately, the ECHO program's IDeA States Pediatric Clinical Trials Network (ISPCTN) provides children in rural and medically underserved communities with the opportunity to participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials and is the only NIH clinical trial network focused on children from these locations. 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 across 44 states.

The ECHO program continues to produce impactful research that advances understanding of the root causes of childhood chronic disease. In one example, an ECHO-funded study found that children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy, whether occasionally or regularly, were more likely to have higher blood pressure and hypertension, underscoring the critical importance of smoking reduction during pregnancy for children's long-term cardiovascular health.[i] Another ECHO study demonstrated that exposure to multiple indoor and outdoor environmental factors in early childhood, including ambient fine particle air pollution ($PM_{2.5}$), household water damage or dampness, and dust mites, is associated with a higher risk of developing asthma.[ii]

ECHO-funded research also helps to inform efforts to understand health outcomes across communities. For instance, one study found that children living in medically underserved areas tend to have different sleep patterns than children in better-resourced areas, including later bedtimes and wake times, and a lower likelihood of getting the recommended amount of sleep, while differences between rural and non-rural communities were relatively small.[iii] These findings highlight the importance of comprehensive access to health care and resources in shaping children's sleep health and can help inform targeted support for medically underserved areas. Related ECHO research further demonstrates how community conditions shape child health, finding that children living in areas with high levels of poverty and gun violence were much less likely to report excellent or very good health, underscoring the importance of safe communities in supporting healthy child development.[iv]

This year, the ECHO program is celebrating its 10-year anniversary. Throughout the past decade, ECHO Cohort research teams have collaborated to build a dataset and body of knowledge that is helping the nation better understand the impact of environmental influences on child health and development, while the ISPCTN has brought access to trials to children from rural and underserved communities. Sustained investment in ECHO will strengthen its role as a national health resource, ensuring continued data collection and research on timely child health and well-being questions while accelerating the translation of science into meaningful action.

Thank you for your longstanding and continued commitment to this vital child research program. We urge you to continue to provide $180 million to sustain the important research supported by ECHO to improve the health of children and look forward to working with you to advance child health and well-being.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
March of Dimes
[List of Organizations]

---

[i] Shorey-Kendrick LE, Ladd-Acosta C, Zhao H, et al. Association of Maternal Smoking During Pregnancy With Childhood Blood Pressure and Hypertension in the ECHO Cohort. *Circulation*. 2026;153(7):536-539. doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.125.076520

[ii] Shiroshita A, Zanobetti A, Coull BA, et al. Individual and combined effects of indoor home exposures and ambient $PM_{2.5}$ during early life on childhood asthma in us birth cohort studies. *Environ Epidemiol*. 2025;10(1):e443. Published 2025 Dec 23. doi:10.1097/EE9.0000000000000443

[iii] Lancaster BD, Wallisch A, Knapp EA, et al. Exploring sleep outcomes in youth across settings: Are there differences based on rurality or medically underserved status in the ECHO cohort?. Sleep Med. 2026;139:108754. doi:10.1016/j.sleep.2025.108754

[iv] Somayaji N, Knapp EA, Churchill ML, et al. Associations between neighborhood-level gun violence and child general health status: An ECHO cohort analysis. *Injury*. 2025;56(11):112752. doi:10.1016/j.injury.2025.112752