October 14, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairman  Vice Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Appropriations  Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairman  Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services, on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies  Education and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

The undersigned organizations representing the public health community, health professionals, academic institutions and families are writing to express opposition to the proposed $21.7 million cut to the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant in the FY2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) bill, which passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The Title V MCH Block Grant is a cost effective, accountable, and flexible funding source used to address the most critical, pressing and unique needs of maternal and child health populations in each state. While we are deeply appreciative of the Committee’s recognition of the work done by individual states as reflected in the proposed $5,369,000 increase to the state grant portion of the Title V Block Grant, we remain extremely concerned about the proposed $27,000,000 reduction in funding for the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) portion.

While the state allotments comprise the bulk of Title V MCH Block Grant spending, the SPRANS portion of the Title V Block Grant is essential to achieving Title V’s mission of ensuring the health of the nation’s mothers, women, children and youth, including children and youth with special health care needs, and their families. In FY2015, $75,142,567 in SPRANS funding supports the work of 208 grantees across all 50 states by funding innovation, workforce, technical assistance, quality improvement and other mission critical efforts including genetics services and newborn screening, and treatments for sickle cell disease and hemophilia.

For example, SPRANS grants support training programs within universities across the country to prepare the next generation of maternal and child health leaders who will go on to serve in communities throughout the United States. The Sickle Cell Demonstration Program at Washington University in St. Louis provides education to both medical providers and patients about sickle cell disease and leads a regional collaborative to provide education, quality improvement activities and training for medical providers in a four state region. At Seattle Children’s Hospital, SPRANS funding supports research to improve screenings for adolescents with the goal of reducing risky behaviors.

Many of the SPRANS funded projects enable states to leverage their own funding by promoting the sharing of innovative and evidence-based practices. The Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoIIN) to Reduce Infant Mortality, funded in part by SPRANS dollars, is a public-private partnership to reduce infant mortality and improve birth outcomes. Participants learn from one another and national experts, share best practices and lessons learned, and track progress toward shared benchmarks. Declines in infant mortality, non-medically indicated early term deliveries, the number of women smoking during pregnancy and preterm birth have already been observed in the 13 Southern states where the CoIIN began. In the absence of SPRANS grants, many states would miss opportunities to implement evidence-based practices that results show improve the health and well-being of women, children and families who reside within those states.
We are aware that the Committee was forced to make difficult decisions in order to keep total spending within the levels set by a low allocation and sequestration. We maintain that nondefense discretionary programs cannot continue to bear the brunt of efforts to reduce the federal deficit. As you work to advance the FY2016 Labor-HHS bill, we urge you to fix sequestration and restore funding for all components of Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant to its pre-sequester level of $639 million. For additional information on MCH programs in your state please contact Amy Haddad at the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs at 202-266-3045 or ahaddad@amchp.org.

Thank you for your consideration,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Center for Leadership Education in Maternal and Child Public Health at the University of Minnesota
Center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health at the University of Illinois School of Public Health
Center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health at the University of Washington
Center of Excellence in MCH at Boston University School of Public Health Department of Community Health Sciences
Children's Hospital Association
Children's Hospital Colorado
EverThrive Illinois
Family Voices
Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina
Hemophilia of Georgia
Oregon Health & Science University
Prevent Blindness
Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University
San Ysidro Health Center
School-Based Health Alliance
The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
University at Albany
University of Illinois School of Public Health
University of Kansas
University of Massachusetts Boston
University of South Florida College of Public Health
University of Wisconsin Health - American Family Children's Hospital
University of Wisconsin Pediatric Pulmonary Center Grant
University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health

cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee