

March 31, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dennis Rehberg
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairman Rehberg, Ranking Member Shelby, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As organizations committed to the health and well-being of our nation's children and families, we urge you reject efforts to eliminate or substantially reduce funding for our nation's network of highly effective and cost-efficient poison control centers.

Federal funding for poison control centers has enjoyed strong bipartisan support since initially authorized by Congress in 2000. In Fiscal Year 2010, Congress allocated \$29.3 million in funding to supplement local and state support for the 57 poison control centers that serve our nation 24 hours per day, year-round. Federal dollars represent approximately 20 percent of the total required to operate the entire U.S. poison center network; the remainder is provided by state and local partners, as well as the universities, hospitals, and other facilities that house poison centers. The program is an outstanding example of a successful public-private/state-federal partnership clearly benefitting public health nationwide.

Poison control services save healthcare dollars and save lives. The extraordinary value of the national poison center program was documented in a 2004 Institute of Medicine report, which noted that poison centers save over \$7 for every \$1 spent in state and federal funding. This modest investment prevents more than \$1 billion of unnecessary healthcare costs annually. The savings chiefly reflects safe home management of patients with possible poisoning, toxic exposures and adverse drug reactions who would otherwise unnecessarily utilize doctors' offices, ambulances and hospitals at a much greater cost. An additional \$9 is saved for every \$1 spent in improved care of poisoned patients admitted to hospitals for care. Poison centers help direct more effective laboratory testing, antidotes and patient care, thereby shortening length of hospital stays.

Failing to provide federal financial support will close poison centers, decrease access to care, increase healthcare costs, and put lives at risk.

Each member of the nationwide network of poison control centers fields thousands of calls, conducts local outreach and education, and serves as a critical member of the local health and public health community. Eliminating the network in favor of a single, centralized call center raises practical questions of capacity and would sacrifice the vital role played by these centers in each state's health care system.

The life-saving and cost-saving value of America's network of poison control centers is well documented. We urge you and all Members of Congress to support level funding of \$29.3 million for the national poison control program in the final FY 2011 appropriations legislation, and to reject the fiscally unwise and illogical cuts to this very successful national public health program. If we may provide further information or assistance, please contact Cindy Pellegrini with the American Academy of Pediatrics at 202/347-8600.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Poison Control Centers
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Osteopathic Emergency Physicians
American Medical Response
American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Children's Healthcare is a Legal Duty
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
Consumer Federation of America
Family Violence Prevention Fund
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of EMS Physicians
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of State EMS Officials
National WIC Association
Prevention Institute
Safe Kids USA
Safe States Alliance (formerly STIPDA)
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Trust for America's Health
Voices for America's Children