

March 5, 2024

Carole Johnson, MA
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Administrator Johnson:

Our organizations write to you today about the implementation of the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program (PSLRP). We greatly appreciate the work of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to issue the first-ever PSLRP awards last year, and to work with provider organizations to address some of the challenges that applicants faced with last year's application process. As you know, this important program was created to address the serious shortages of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and pediatric mental health providers across the United States, which directly impact access to equitable care for children, especially those with serious, chronic or complex health care needs.

We are pleased that HRSA is considering ways to ensure that this year's application requirements – including provider clinical hours and employment site eligibility requirements – reflect how pediatric subspecialty care is practiced and the regionalization of pediatric specialty care. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with your team on workable solutions to these issues.

At the same time, we are concerned that pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists were underrepresented in the final awardee pool. According to the data we have seen, HRSA received 836 eligible applications from physicians, but offered loan repayment awards to only 34 (out of 122 total awards offered) — a 4.1% award rate.

Therefore, as HRSA looks forward to its second round of applications for this program in the summer of 2024, we urge you to adopt application selection criteria that ensures that providers with high graduate debt can benefit equally from this important program. In order to encourage physicians to undergo pediatric specialty training, policies must recognize the unique financial disincentives to participating in pediatric subspecialty fellowships after having already completed medical school and 3-5 years of residency.

When Congress enacted this important program, its intent was to address the significant shortages facing pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists, as well as the shortages facing other pediatric mental health professionals. These shortages continue and are impeding access to care for children with serious physical and mental health needs in underserved areas.

Without a sufficient federal investment in the workforce of pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists, children will continue to face long wait times for subspecialty care, need to travel long distances to receive that care, or go without care altogether. We ask for your urgent attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Rheumatology
American Pediatric Society
American Society of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology
American Academy of Ophthalmology
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Pediatric Program Directors
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology
Boston Children's Hospital
California Children's Hospital Association
Child Neurology Society
Children's Hospital Association
Children's Hospital Los Angeles
Children's Wisconsin
Council of Pediatric Subspecialties
MultiCare Mary Bridge Children's Hospital
Nemours Children's Health
North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition

Pediatric Endocrine Society

Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society

Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America

Pediatric Policy Council

Phoenix Children's

Scoliosis Research Society

Societies for Pediatric Urology

Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Society for Pediatric Research

The Society of Thoracic Surgeons