



PPC Subspecialty Day of Action Toolkit

Tell Congress: Support Children's Access to Specialty Care

Academic Pediatricians:

The Pediatric Policy Council and the American Academy of Pediatrics will lead a **Subspecialty Day of Action on Wednesday, June 20**.

This virtual Day of Action will give academic pediatricians the opportunity to speak up for pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists and the children they care for. The academic pediatric community represents a diverse group of researchers, encompassing both subspecialists and general pediatricians—subspecialty workforce shortages have implications for us all. These critical shortages of pediatric subspecialists impact the future pipeline of academicians as well as the ability to refer to and provide specialized care for complex medical conditions in the children we treat. By coming together on June 20, we will be able to speak with a unified voice on these critical pediatric workforce shortages.

We hope to mobilize a large number of academic pediatricians, pediatric subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists to inform their members of Congress about the important care provided by subspecialists and encourage them to support the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act*. This important bill would ensure that pediatric subspecialists who treat children most in need are able to access loan repayment through the National Health Service Corps.

This toolkit is designed to provide you with the information and resources you need to join the Day of Action on June 20. We encourage you to prepare, customize with information specific to your subspecialty or surgical specialty if applicable, and spread the word to others who would like to join us in this effort.

We need every voice coming together to urge Congress to support the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act*.

Thank you in advance for your help and we very much looking forward to **speaking with one unified voice on June 20!**

Sincerely,

Paul Chung, MD, MS
Chair, Pediatric Policy Council

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Background

Pediatric subspecialists provide specialized care to children, many of whom have complex medical conditions or require long-term, coordinated care for chronic illnesses. Despite their crucial role providing care to the most vulnerable children, pediatric subspecialists are in short supply. Nationwide, critical shortages of pediatric subspecialists prevent children from getting the care they need. The result is that families face long wait times to get appointments with subspecialists or must travel long distances to access needed health care, and primary care pediatricians have difficulty referring out to subspecialists.

There are a number of barriers to subspecialty training, and several of them are economic disincentives with the potential to be addressed through policy interventions. First, medical students who wish to become pediatric subspecialists face an additional two- to three-year fellowship on top of the standard three-year residency required to become a general pediatrician, or they must complete another primary residency. Second, pediatric fellows forgo a full salary during this time, earning a small stipend while often accruing interest on outstanding medical school debt. Third, practicing pediatric subspecialists often earn less than general pediatricians, due in part to low Medicaid reimbursement rates, or they earn more but not enough to compensate for their loss of salary during fellowship.

Recognizing that the health care workforce is the backbone of the health care delivery system, federal policy has long played a role in ensuring an adequate physician workforce. For instance, the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) has helped fill gaps in primary care for underserved areas for over 40 years, while the Title VII health professions programs of the Public Health Service Act support health professions education and training. Central to both of these programs is the ability to address the economic drivers of decisions to practice medicine.

Legislative Advocacy Opportunity

The *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act* (H.R. 3767/S. 989) attempts to address financial barriers to providing subspecialty care for children. The bill, introduced by Reps. Billy Long (R-Mo.) and Joe Courtney (D-Conn.) in the U.S. House of Representatives and Sens. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) and Jack Reed (D-R.I.) in the U.S. Senate, would incentivize more pediatric subspecialists to practice in underserved areas by modifying the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) loan repayment program.

The NHSC, established in 1972 and administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration, provides loan repayment and scholarship opportunities for providers who serve two years in high-need or underserved areas. The modifications would include pediatric subspecialists and child psychiatrists who are currently ineligible, list children and adolescents as an underserved population for needed medical services, and ensure that relevant pediatric subspecialty training sites and programs meet eligibility criteria.

This bill will incentivize pediatricians to pursue subspecialty training because it reduces the overall loan burden from training and will encourage more pediatric subspecialists to practice in rural and underserved

communities, connecting more families with appropriate subspecialists. More than 60 public health and medical organizations have endorsed H.R. 3767/S. 989, which would help provide children with timely access to important health services, no matter their health condition or ZIP code.

On June 20, please email or call your representative and senators and urge them to cosponsor H.R. 3767/S. 989 (instructions below), particularly if they are a member of the [House Energy and Commerce Committee](#) or the [Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions \(HELP\) Committee](#). First, check to see whether your [representative](#) or [senators](#) are currently cosponsors of the bill. If they are a cosponsor of H.R. 3767/S.989, you can take this opportunity to thank them for their support and encourage them to advance other legislation to strengthen the pediatric subspecialty workforce.

How to Customize Your Advocacy Messages

There are many ways to customize your advocacy messages to make them more effective. Your unique child health perspective, patient anecdotes, and state-specific information help to paint a vivid picture of the issue, making your overall message more compelling.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Briefly explain your subspecialty, if relevant, and the child health issues you treat. For example, instead of simply introducing yourself over the phone or in an email as a pediatric endocrinologist, you can say – I am a pediatric endocrinologist in {insert your city, state} that specializes in the care of children with Type 1 diabetes.
- Tell a story. Briefly discussing the impact of pediatric subspecialty workforce shortages on real children and families can help to make the connection between the issue you are asking your lawmakers to solve and the policies you are asking them to support.
- Keep it local. Members of Congress are sent to Washington to improve the lives of their constituents, and they care deeply about what is going on in their district or state. If children in your state are traveling hundreds of miles to get care, tell them about it. If you are the only pediatric oncologist in your state, they will want to know. The more connections you can make to the people and places they represent, the easier it will be to get them to take the issue seriously.
- Don't forget the ask. End your communication with a clear, simple legislative ask.

Contact Your Members of Congress

On June 20, please consider reaching out directly to your federal legislators and urging them to support the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act*. **The more voices that come together with the same message on June 20, the stronger our overall message.**

We've included instructions below on how to call or email your members of Congress on June 20 along with key messages to guide your outreach.

By Phone: You can call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected to your two senators and representative. You also can find your representative and senators by going to [House.gov](#) and "Find Your Representative" and [Senate.gov](#) and "Find Your Senators." The contact information for their Washington, DC office is available on their websites.

Talking points

- Hello. I am from {your state} and I am a pediatric {insert your subspecialty, e.g., endocrinologist, etc.}, which means I specialize in the care of children with {insert example of medical condition or population you treat}. I am calling today to urge {Senator's/Representative's name} to cosponsor the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act* (H.R. 3767/S. 989).
- As an academic pediatrician, my research focuses on {discuss the type of research you do and the impact it has on patient care; e.g., "my research focuses on finding a cure for Type 1 diabetes"}.
- {Personalize with information about your practice and the patients you see}
- Across the country, there are significant shortages of pediatric subspecialists and child and adolescent psychiatrists, which lead to long commutes for parents seeking care for their children and appointment wait times that can last more than 10 weeks. For a child with a complex, serious health condition, 10 weeks can seem like a lifetime.
- There are many causes for these pediatric subspecialty workforce shortages, but the additional investment in time and money to become a subspecialist is a major driver.
- The *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act* would modify the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) loan repayment program to allow pediatric subspecialists working in underserved areas to participate, helping to address the current shortage and geographic disparities that impact a child's ability to access the subspecialty care he or she needs.
- The bill would incentivize pediatricians to pursue specialties because it reduces the overall loan burden from training and would encourage more pediatric subspecialists to practice in rural and underserved communities, connecting more families with needed subspecialists.
- As an academic pediatrician who treats children with special health care needs, I see every day the impact that workforce shortages have on our most vulnerable children and families.
- Please consider cosponsoring the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act* (H.R. 3767/S. 989) and supporting efforts to reduce critical shortages of pediatric subspecialists.
- Thank you for all you do for children.

By Email: You can contact your members of Congress directly through their websites; if you are an AAP member, you can be directly connected to your members of Congress through federaladvocacy.aap.org. You will need to login using your AAP ID and password. Click on "[Support Children's Access to Specialty Care](#)" in the Advocacy Action Center. There, you will be provided with a customizable email template to send your legislators. The email form letter can also be found below:

Subject: Support Children's Access to Specialty Care

As an academic pediatrician, I urge you to co-sponsor the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act* (H.R. 3767/S. 989) in order to help provide children with timely access to important health services, no matter their health condition or ZIP code.

Across the country, there are significant shortages of pediatric subspecialists and child and adolescent psychiatrists, which lead to long commutes for parents seeking care for their children and appointment wait times that can last more than 10 weeks. For a child with a complex, serious health condition, 10 weeks can seem like a lifetime.

There is also a significant disparity in the geographic distribution of pediatric subspecialists across the country to treat these children, resulting in many children in underserved rural and urban areas not receiving timely health care. Children with complex medical conditions warranting subspecialty care are among the most vulnerable; their ability to see the right doctor in a reasonable amount of time should not be determined by where they live.

H.R. 3767/S. 989 would modify the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) loan repayment program to allow pediatric subspecialists working in underserved areas to participate, helping to address the current shortage and geographic disparities that impact a child's ability to access the subspecialty care he or she needs. The NHSC is a federal program dedicated to ensuring access to health care for everyone, especially the most vulnerable populations. The NHSC provides loan repayment and scholarship opportunities for providers who serve two years in high need or underserved areas.

The bill would incentivize pediatricians to pursue specialties because it reduces the overall loan burden from training and would encourage more pediatric subspecialists to practice in rural and underserved communities, connecting more families with needed subspecialists.

Please consider co-sponsoring the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act* in order to help improve children's access to critical health care services.

Thank you for all you do for children.

Social Media Messages

On June 20, use #PutKids1st to share messages on Twitter about the importance of the *Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act*. It is recommended that you send individual tweets per legislator, compared to grouping all their handles in one tweet. You are more likely to get engagement if the tweet is personalized for a single congressperson.

Handles for all U.S. Senators: <https://twitter.com/cspan/lists/senators/members>

Handles for all U.S. Representatives: <https://twitter.com/cspan/lists/u-s-representatives>

Sample tweets:

- Children with complex medical conditions warranting subspecialty care need to see the right doctor in a reasonable amount of time. That should not be determined by where they live. Congress needs to #PutKids1st and support the Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act.
- I am a {insert type of subspecialist pediatrician} in {state} and I am asking {Congressperson Twitter handle} to #PutKids1st and support the Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act. Children with complex medical conditions should not wait 10 weeks or more for the care they need.
- All children need timely access to important health services, no matter their health condition or ZIP code. {Congressperson Twitter handle} I encourage you to #PutKids1st and support the Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act.
- Children with complex, serious health conditions need to be able to see the right doctor in a reasonable amount of time. But that's not happening due to pediatric specialty shortages. Congress needs to #PutKids1st and support the Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act.

Other Helpful Resources

- [Pediatric Workforce Shortages Persist Fact Sheet, Children's Hospital Association](#)
- [Does Fellowship Pay: What Is the Long-term Financial Impact of Subspecialty Training in Pediatrics?](#)
- [Are We There Yet? Distance to Care and Relative Supply Among Pediatric Medical Subspecialties](#)
- [Medicaid and CHIP: Most Physicians Serve Covered Children but Have Difficulty Referring Them for Specialty Care](#)
- [Pediatric Resident Debt and Career Intentions](#)
- [Improve Child Health through a Strong Pediatric Workforce](#)