

February 14, 2006

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member,

We write to urge you to restore funding in President Bush's recently proposed budget for the National Longitudinal Cohort Study of American Children (The National Children's Study), which was authorized under the Children's Health Act of 2000. The proposed study, to be conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), has received broad bi-partisan support over the past five years, yet the President has just proposed to cut all appropriations for the study. This seems especially misguided given that six Vanguard Study Centers and one Coordinating Center were just awarded contracts in the fall of 2005.

Funding has never been more critical for the National Children's Study (NCS). Rates of many chronic diseases, asthma, leukemia, some birth defects, certain learning and developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders and obesity are on the rise in this country. We need to figure out why and NCS is poised to do that. Working groups have completed nearly all research protocols, and researchers at the new Vanguard Study Sites are ready to study links to diseases that affect not only children but adults as well – cardiovascular diseases, infertility, neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's, diabetes and osteoporosis, just to name a few.

NCS will not only lay the groundwork for substantial improvements in children's health and the health of adults, it will also save billions of dollars in health care costs. Childhood diseases of environmental origin alone cost Americans at least \$54.9 billion annually according to 2002 study published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, the journal of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and evidence exists that those costs could increase in the future. In an economic analysis by the NICHD, the health care savings that could result from the NCS research is estimated to be in the range of 3.3 – 5.5 billion dollars annually.

Three specific examples of opportunities for economic savings that NCS could provide are: asthma, mental retardation and autism. Between 1980 and 1996, the percentage of American children with asthma has doubled. Today, asthma is the most common chronic illness in children, accounting for one third of all pediatric emergency room visits nationwide, and disproportionately affecting minorities and children living in the inner cities. According to NICHD, NCS has the potential to save almost one billion dollars annually for health costs related to asthma. In terms of mental retardation, NCS could mean an estimated 3.6 percent reduction in total MR cases, equivalent of an estimated economic savings in the range of \$1.0-2.6 billion each year. NCS also has the potential for saving of 0.2 - 0.6 billion dollars annually in terms of the economic burden of autism.

Please be reminded that NCS is an historic opportunity to make unique and significant contributions to our understanding of the extent to which a comprehensive set of environmental, behavioral, and other factors affect children's health. This study will examine how exposure to numerous factors in early life may cause or predispose individuals to certain chronic diseases or conditions. It will also track the effects of environmental conditions on children from birth through childhood. When completed, the

NCS will be the richest information resource for questions related to child health that this country has ever seen. Given that environmental disease is preventable, the research compiled will help define better guidelines and policy to protect children's health and our country's future for generations to come.

In short, NCS offers a vital opportunity to identify critical contributors to a host of chronic diseases and conditions -- and ultimately reduce their prevalence and cost to society. We therefore strongly urge you to fight this proposed budget cut for the National Children's Study. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Elise Miller, M.Ed.
Executive Director

Institute for Children's Environmental Health

Also: National Coordinator, Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment
National Coordinator, The Collaborative on Health and the Environment's Learning and
Developmental Disabilities Initiative

1646 Dow Road
Freeland, WA 98249
Ph: 360-331-7904; Fax: 360-331-7908
emiller@iceh.org; www.iceh.org; www.partnersforchildren.org

Other signatories include:

Robert O. Zdenek
Alliance for Healthy Homes
Washington, DC

Doreen Croser
American Association for Mental Retardation
Washington, DC

Amy Winans
Association for Children's Mental Health
Okemos, MI

Mo Mayrides
Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America
Washington, DC

Elizabeth Horn
Autism Recovery Consortium
San Mateo, CA

Lee Grossman
Autism Society of America
Bethesda, MD

Jenny Greenwood
Autism Society, Spokane Chapter
Spokane, WA

Betty Mekdeci
Birth Defect Research for Children
Orlando, FL

Lois Gibbs
Center for Health, Environment and Justice
Falls Church, VA

Cynthia F. Bearer, M.D., Ph.D.
Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
Cleveland, OH

Nsedu Witherspoon
Children's Environmental Health Network
Washington, DC

Christopher Gavigan
Children's Health Environmental Coalition
Los Angeles, CA

Frederica Perera, PhD
Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health
New York, NY

Parin Shah
Community Toolbox for Children's Environmental Health
San Francisco, CA

John Balbus, MD
Environmental Defense
Washington, DC

Howard A. Learner
Environmental Law and Policy Center
Chicago, IL

Patricia J. Wood
Grassroots Environmental Education
Port Washington, NY

Ellen Weininger
Grassroots Environmental Education
Scarsdale, NY

Rachel Filippini
Group Against Smog and Pollution
Pittsburgh, PA

Neil Gendel
Healthy Children Organizing Project
San Francisco, CA

Claire Barnett
Healthy Schools Network
Albany, NY

David Wallinga, MD
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Minneapolis, MN

Steve Gilbert, PhD
Institute for Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders
Seattle, WA

Tessa Hill
Kids for Saving Earth Worldwide
Minneapolis, MN

Kathy Lawson
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Pittsburgh, PA

Jo Behm, RN
Learning Disabilities Association of California
Sacramento, CA

Heather Loukmas
Learning Disabilities Association of New York
Albany, NY

Troy Hanson, MD
Minnesota Youth Wellness & Advocacy
Twin Cities, MN

Robert J. Fletcher
National Association for the Dually Diagnosed
Kingston, NY

Jennifer Sass, PhD
Natural Resources Defense Council
Washington, DC

Amy Goldsmith
NJ Environmental Federation
Marlton, NJ

Joel Shufro
New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health
New York, NY

William Couzens
Next Generation Choices Foundation
Pittsburgh, PA

Jackie Hunt Christensen
Parkinson Association of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

Monica Moore
Pesticide Action Network North America Regional Center
San Francisco, CA

Lyn Redwood
SafeMinds
Tyrone, GA

Ted Schettler, MD, MPH
Science and Environmental Health Network
Newburyport, MA

Sue Swenson
The Arc of the United States
Silver Spring, MD

Stephen Bennett
United Cerebral Palsy
Washington, DC

Vincent Garry, MD
University of Minnesota Medical School
Minneapolis, MN

Frederick vom Saal, PhD
University of Missouri, Division of Biological Sciences
Columbia, MO

Therese Grant, PhD
University of Washington School of Medicine, Washington State Parent-Child Assistance Program
Seattle, WA

Cc: Sen. Conrad Burns
Sen. Byron Dorgan
Sen. Tom Harkin
Sen. Arlen Specter