

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2023

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you draft your Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to include \$215 million for the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). This level of funding will help reverse more than a decade of sequestration and lost purchasing power for an agency that provides gold-standard public health and health care data, an essential and unbiased resource for policymakers at all levels of government. We believe the investment is justified by the fact that more timely, detailed, and relevant data can help save lives, create jobs, and lower public and private sector costs.

The United States is emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with a profound understanding of the resources needed to mount a response to a severe public health emergency. To prepare for the next public health threat and ensure we make wise investments, we need access to high quality, granular data that demonstrate the impact of any public health threat in real time. Increased support for NCHS will ensure that our nation is better prepared to deal with future outbreaks, natural disasters, and national emergencies.

In recent years, NCHS has been successful in providing critical information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and opioid epidemic among other health concerns. However, we can better respond to these threats with a more modern data collection and analysis infrastructure. NCHS needs increased funding to support the improved timeliness, scope, quality, and usability of data on vital events, health care access and utilization, and population health. Additional resources are also critical to enhance the dissemination of data to meet the needs of a wide range of users, including policymakers at the state and local level, as they act to create safer and healthier communities.

Hosted within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NCHS produces information on such topics as chronic disease prevalence, health disparities, teen pregnancy, infant mortality, disproportionate maternal mortality among African American women,

emergency room use, causes of death, and rates of insurance through a set of efficient, multipurpose data collection systems. The datasets which produce this information are used across the Federal government and play an essential part in making up the nation's statistical and public health infrastructure. For example, NCHS health data is critical for helping officials better understand and confront some of our most pressing health concerns, including the opioid crisis and the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19. Some common stakeholders that utilize this data include the Census Bureau to develop population estimates and projections; the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop nutrition policies that guide multibillion dollar federal food assistance programs; state and local governments and public health officials; federal policymakers; and health services researchers.

Over the past decade, as our country has experienced numerous devastating public health crises, NCHS's budget has also lost ground to inflation. The agency has lost 18% of its purchasing power since FY 2010, preventing the agency from keeping up with technological advances and hindering its ability to meet growing data needs. NCHS urgently needs increased funding to maintain its high-quality, in-demand data products and take advantage of the emerging opportunities presented by more powerful processing tools and research advances. With increased funding, NCHS could:

- **Collect the information needed to monitor health and health care and make it available when it is needed.** NCHS will build on its existing strong data collection systems by adopting new data collection methodologies and targeting new data sources, including electronic health records, that will expand the range of information available along with more timely data release. It will also support the modernization of states' vital registration systems, including electronic death registration and medical examiner case management systems.
- **Better understand the health of our nation, including health disparities, to inform policies to improve our health and ameliorate these disparities.** By significantly expanding the NCHS Data Linkage Program across the Department of Health and Human Services and other government data holdings, NCHS could considerably the understanding provided by its data. NCHS has demonstrated the benefit in linking survey and vital registration data with CMS, SSA, and HUD data holdings, but has lacked the requisite support to take full advantage of these resources. By crosslinking among such data sets, as well as to economic, transportation, food, and education data sets, we could better understand our nation's health and other social determinants.
- **Expand data on underserved communities.** In response to the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities, NCHS will expand the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on underserved communities. NCHS data systems already allow for data to be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, income, veteran status, and other key demographic variables. However, sample sizes limit the ability to show data with the needed granularity on these characteristics and to combine characteristics needed to define the most marginalized groups. In addition

to an expansion in data collection to address disparities, dissemination modalities will also be expanded to make the information more accessible to policy makers as well as other users.

- **Make data more easily accessible for policy formation, program monitoring, and research.** NCHS will restructure its data access platform so that information can be easily found and presented in a way that will address pressing questions about the range of health and health care concerns. It is important to have the data in a form that can be easily used by decision makers at all levels of government in times of emergencies.


Increased investment in NCHS will allow the agency to take better advantage of its expertise and become a nimble twenty-first century statistical agency. Funding NCHS at \$215 million in FY24 is supported by a wide range of organizations representing public health, health care providers, researchers, state health officials, patient advocates, and more.

Thank you again for your attention to our request. With your support, NCHS will continue to shape our understanding of Americans' health with objective, relevant, accurate, and timely information.

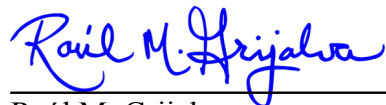
Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



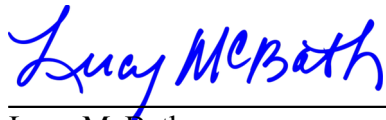
Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



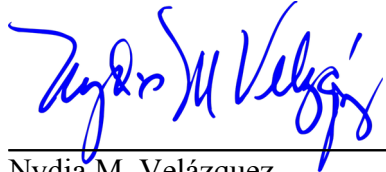
André Carson
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



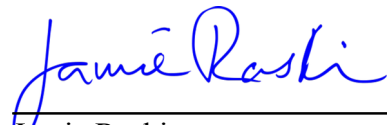
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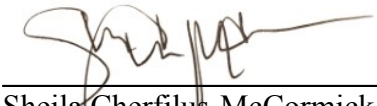
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



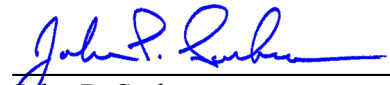
Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



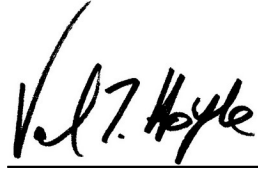
Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
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John P. Sarbanes
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Val Hoyle
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