January 12, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
455 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Fax: (202) 228-3398

Dear Chairman Alexander:

On behalf of the 5,000 pediatrician members of the American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA), I write to express our concerns with positions expressed by Representative Tom Price, M.D., the President-elect’s nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. In particular, Representative Price has indicated a desire to eliminate or dramatically impact programs and policies that are critical to the health and well-being of California’s children and families.

Representative Price has superior experience as an orthopedic surgeon, i.e., “a physician devoted to the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of injuries, disorders and diseases of the body’s musculoskeletal system,” and has trained countless others in his specialty. His direct expertise is not in children or families’ general care or well-being, or in providing services related to the public health. In these matters, it is, therefore, important to fully understand Representative Price’s positions, and the evidence or rationale he has used to arrive at them.

Pediatricians observe firsthand the way in which public health policies and public funding decisions have an outsized effect on children’s health. We urge you to pay special attention to these issues as they relate to children when you have the opportunity to speak with Representative Price, and to ask from him a strong commitment to the future of our country by safeguarding and supporting the health and well-being of the most vulnerable among us, our children.

We thought it might be useful for your conversation with Representative Price to identify some of his stated positions that appear contrary to the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Blueprint for Children. The Blueprint, released in September 2016, recommends priorities, including those highlighted below, for an incoming administration that wishes to improve the health and well-being of children nationwide.

- **Healthy Children:** Our children must have access to affordable, high-quality health care. This requires comprehensive health insurance. The AAP recommends that the next administration strengthen the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); ensure that children covered under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) receive high-quality, affordable services; and improve access to Medicaid, among other steps.
Representative Price has voted against expanding CHIP and favors repeal of the ACA. He has indicated that he supports the conversion of Medicaid into a block grant program, which would drastically reduce federal funding for the program and threaten the healthcare coverage of millions across the country, including children and their caregivers. He also is a member of the relatively small Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, considered by many to be outside of the mainstream views in medicine, which endorses a policy of physician “non-participation” in Medicaid — a position that, if implemented, would effectively bar many poor children and families from health care.

- **Secure Families:** No family should have to pick and choose which of their child's most basic needs it will meet due to extreme resource constraints. We must work together to eliminate poverty among this country’s working families, so that all parents are able to provide safe and secure housing, healthy and nutritious food and adequate childcare for their children. This requires expanding direct assistance to needy families, ending family homelessness and reducing housing instability, expanding programs for at-risk parents, improving the child-welfare system, and strengthening federal nutrition programs.

Representative Price has consistently opposed expansion of direct assistance to low-income families. In the 2015 budget blueprint he released as Chairman of the House Budget Committee, Representative Price calls for severe cuts to non-defense discretionary programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which he proposes turning into a block grant program. He has also voted against expanding Section 8 housing vouchers, strengthening family leave and raising the minimum wage.

- **Strong Communities:** All children deserve to grow up in a safe, supportive community where violence, disease, and environmental hazards are kept to a minimum. In order to accomplish this, we must allow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct public health research on gun violence, pass common-sense gun control measures, support the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in its efforts to ensure clean air and water for all, address failing infrastructure that pumps lead and other contaminants into our water supply, and fully fund disaster preparation and response efforts. We must also improve access to high-quality early education programs such as Head Start and provide resources to low-income communities so that all children have the opportunity to lead safe, active lifestyles.

Representative Price has voted against gun control legislation and supported repeal of Washington, D.C.'s assault weapons ban. He has also repeatedly voiced skepticism of the usefulness of the EPA and voted to block its regulations. Representative Price also voted against relief for victims of Hurricane Sandy. He has been inconsistent on Head Start and early education, and has not supported economic aid efforts to low-income communities.

- **Leading Nation:** To ensure our position as a global leader for children the next administration should take bold steps to promote medical research, aggressively address climate change and its health impact on children, and combat stigma based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability, which children feel and suffer from at an early age. We must also reform our broken immigration system so that children are not detained or separated from their parents.
Representative Price has voted to bar the EPA from considering greenhouse gases a pollutant, and has pledged to oppose any climate change legislation that might raise taxes. He has been consistent in his opposition to LGBT rights laws, opposing hate crime legislation and voting against workplace protections. He has also voted against the Violence Against Women Act. Representative Price has supported providing government services in English only, jeopardizing the health and well-being of children—including those present legally—whose families do not speak English.

The Blueprint also makes specific recommendations for federal agencies and departments, including the Department of Health and Human Services. Among these recommendations are to:

- **Eliminate barriers to health care for immigrant children.**
  Representative Price opposes not only the expansion of government programs that could accomplish such a goal, but also programs such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that enable many immigrant children to reside safely in this country.

- **Fund pregnancy prevention and adolescent health.**
  Representative Price has insisted that “not one” woman has ever struggled to afford contraception, as justification for his opposition to the mandate that it be covered under insurance plans. He also opposes Planned Parenthood, which offers thousands of adolescents across the country the opportunity to receive safe, confidential reproductive health care.

- **Support and improve the Affordable Care Act (ACA).**
  Representative Price opposes the Affordable Care Act and wishes to repeal it.

We hope that Representative Price will speak directly to these issues in the confirmation process, and that you will take into account his prior statements and current responses when evaluating Representative Price’s nomination. Further, should Representative Price be confirmed, we urge you to hold him accountable on these matters, and to ask that he listen and learn from those in specialties who care directly for children, and most importantly, that he pay close attention to input from families and others who will be directly affected by the direction he chooses to take in this critically important leadership role.

Sincerely,

Kris Calvin
Chief Executive Officer
American Academy of Pediatrics, California