

May 4, 2017

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives:

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) is the premier advocacy organization for the 6.5 million children with disabilities eligible for special education services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) and the over 700,000 additional students with disabilities protected by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504).

We write in opposition to the American Health Care Act (AHCA) which would make disastrous cuts to Medicaid, jeopardizing the education, health and safety of vulnerable children, particularly children with disabilities and those living in poverty.

Specifically, the AHCA defaults on Medicaid's 50+ year commitment to provide America's children with access to vital healthcare services that ensure they have adequate educational opportunities and can contribute to society by imposing a per-capita cap and shifting current and future costs to taxpayers in every state and Congressional district. While children currently comprise almost half of all Medicaid beneficiaries, less than one in five dollars is spent by Medicaid on children. Accordingly, a per-capita cap, will disproportionately harm children's access to care, including services received at school. Considering this consequence of the bill's design, **we urge a "no" vote on AHCA.**

Since 1988, Medicaid has permitted payment to schools for certain medically-necessary services provided to children under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) through an individualized education program (IEP) or individualized family service program (IFSP). Schools are thus eligible to be reimbursed for direct medical services to Medicaid-eligible students with an IEP or IFSP. School districts use their Medicaid reimbursement funds in a variety of ways to help support the learning and development of the children they serve. I

In a 2017 survey of school districts, district officials reported that two-thirds of Medicaid dollars are used to support the work of health professionals and other specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., speech-language pathologists, audiologists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses) who provide comprehensive health and mental health services to students. Districts also use these funds to expand the availability of a wide range of health and mental health services available to students in poverty, who are more likely to lack consistent access to healthcare professionals. Further, some districts depend on Medicaid reimbursements to purchase and update specialized equipment (e.g., walkers, wheelchairs, exercise equipment, special playground equipment, and equipment to assist with hearing and seeing) as well as assistive technology for students with disabilities to help them learn alongside their peers.

Medicaid is a cost-effective and efficient provider of essential health care services for children. School-based Medicaid programs serve as a lifeline to children who can't access critical health care and health services outside of their school. Under this bill, the bulk of the mandated costs of providing health care coverage would be shifted to the States even though health needs and costs of care for children will remain the same or increase. Most analyses of the AHCA project that the \$880 billion dollar Medicaid funding shortfall in support of these mandated services will increase, placing states at greater risk year after year. The federal disinvestment in Medicaid imposed by the AHCA will force States and local communities to increase taxes and reduce or eliminate various programs and services, including other

non-Medicaid services. The unintended consequences of the AHCA will force states to cut eligibility, services, and benefits for children.

We urge you to carefully consider the important benefits that Medicaid provides to our nation's most vulnerable children. Schools are often the hub of the community, and converting Medicaid's financing structure to per-capita caps threatens to significantly reduce access to comprehensive health and mental and behavioral health care for children with disabilities and those living in poverty. The AHCA's cuts to Medicaid will have devastating effects on thousands of vulnerable children living in your district.

COPAA urges you to **vote NO on passage of the AHCA.**

Sincerely,



Denise Marshall
Executive Director

COPAA is an independent, nonprofit organization of parents, attorneys, advocates, and related professionals. COPAA members nationwide work to protect the civil rights and secure excellence in education on behalf of the 6.5 million children with disabilities in America. COPAA's mission is to serve as a national voice for special education rights and is grounded in the belief that every child deserves the right to a quality education that prepares him or her for meaningful employment, higher education and lifelong learning, as well as full participation in his or her community.