June 30, 2020

The Honorable Roy Cooper  
NC Office of the Governor  
20301 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh NC 27699-0301

Dear Governor Cooper:

On behalf of the NC Pediatric Society and NC Academy of Family Physicians, we are writing today to urge you to veto H918, Expedite Permanency/DHHS Report SNAP/TANF.

The NC Pediatric Society consists of 2,300 pediatricians and other child health professionals across North Carolina. Our Fostering Health NC initiative works with pediatricians, the NC Department of Health and Human Services, local Departments of Social Services, and others to assure that children and youth in foster care receive strong, trauma-informed health services linked to their medical homes. The NC Academy of Family Physicians represents 4,200 family physicians, family medicine residents and medical students across the state.

Our organizations join the NC Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina Medical Society, North Carolina Obstetrical & Gynecological Society and others concerned about child welfare in opposing this legislation.

We are deeply concerned about the potential impact of H918 on child well-being. While we applaud efforts to expedite permanency, there are many concerning provisions that could create unintended consequences. For most children, the path to permanency is often reunification. Making it harder for parents to get the support they need could often make permanency more difficult.

Could result women not seeking needed health care for healthy births: In a 2017 policy statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics notes: “The use of opioids during pregnancy has grown rapidly in the past decade. As opioid use during pregnancy increased, so did complications from their use, including neonatal abstinence syndrome... A public health response, rather than a punitive approach to the opioid epidemic and substance use during pregnancy, is critical... The existing literature supports the position that punitive approaches to substance use in pregnancy are ineffective and may have detrimental effects on both maternal and child health. Qualitative research performed in pregnant women with substance use disorders shows that women may avoid prenatal care for fear of being reported to the police and child protective services” Providing more supports – not increased punishment - to families during this sensitive time is important for promoting child health. (AAP policy statement: https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/02/16/peds.2016-4070)
**Poses challenges for reunification:** Permanency is very important for children and youth in foster care. The goal is frequently and appropriately reunification. The lack of availability and affordability of substance use disorder treatment for a parent and the time needed to seek and receive treatment will impede parents’ attempts to reunite, especially if they lose Medicaid coverage and the ability to pay for treatment when they lose custody of their children.

**Exacerbates shortage of foster homes:** Many provisions, especially those relating to pregnant women and parents who use and abuse substances, will result in more children being removed from their homes. There are no corresponding provisions to increase the number of foster homes, and it can already be challenging to find appropriate placements for children coming into care.

We again urge you to VETO H918. Please let us know if we can provide you with further information or assistance.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Mims, MD, MPH, FAAP  
President, North Carolina Pediatric Society

David A. Rinehart, MD, FAAFP,  
President, NC Academy of Family Physicians.