



The Massachusetts Chapter

February 27, 2015

Rep. Brian Dempsey, House Ways and Means Chair
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Sen. Karen Spilka, Senate Ways and Means Chair
State House, Room 320
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Dempsey and Chairwoman Spilka:

The Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP) represents approximately 1,800 pediatricians across the Commonwealth. We are physicians dedicated to improving the quality of life for children by providing quality health care and advocating for them and their families. The MCAAP is committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental and social health for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

We are writing to you to request restoration of funding for *Reach Out and Read*, line item 3000-7070, which has experienced serious cuts from its FY '09 \$1,000,000 funding level. These cuts have directly affected more than 900 pediatricians and more than 300 clinical locations where *Reach Out and Read* is practiced.

Science has now clearly demonstrated that reading regularly with young children stimulates optimal patterns of brain development and strengthens parent-child relationships at a critical time in childhood. This, in turn, builds language, literacy, and social-emotional skills that last a lifetime and strengthen our citizenry. Beginning in infancy, pediatric providers are uniquely positioned to promote literacy and *Reach out and Read* is widely recognized as one of the most effective vehicles for this.

As you may know, *Reach Out and Read* was founded right here in the Commonwealth at Boston City Hospital (now Boston Medical Center) in 1989. It is based on a simple but sound idea and has grown to an international program with its own evidence-base of independent, peer-reviewed studies. The program effectively increases time that parents spend reading to their children and we now know that this subsequently results in higher receptive and expressive language abilities. We also know that modest investments in early literacy can significantly decrease later costs of special education.

Reach Out and Read is both effective and cost-effective, serving nearly 189,000 children in Massachusetts at 301 locations. Every public dollar is matched with private funds. Last year, hundreds of practices experienced a shortfall of books and either suspended the program or were forced to ration this research-proven intervention. Restoring funding to \$1,000,000 will allow pediatricians and other medical providers to administer the program consistently across all *Reach Out and Read* practices and to grow new programs in our Gateway Cities.

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Last year, the American Academy of Pediatrics published a policy statement that, for the first time ever, formally recommends that pediatricians incorporate both books and advice about reading into every well-child visit. With restored funding, *Reach Out and Read* will be able to move towards fulfilling this mandate by serving many additional children who are growing up in poverty. There are few opportunities where so much *permanent* good can be reaped from so modest an investment. As we write today there are eight practices in New Bedford, Worcester, Taunton and Brockton waiting to begin the program, and more than 50 others that should have the program. With restored funding, we can increase program quality in all current practices, bring on at least eight new locations, and work to recruit the other remaining practices. I hope you will agree that our children deserve this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael L. McManus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Michael McManus, M.D., MPH, FAAP
President, the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics