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May 7, 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber
The United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C., 20515

Dear Representative Barber:

On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a non-profit professional organization of 62,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical subspecialists, I write to thank you for introducing the H.R. 4574, the *Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014*.

Families and children need access to mental health screening and assessment and a full array of evidence-based therapeutic services to appropriately address mental health and substance use disorders. The identification, initial assessment, and care of mental health problems should take place in a child's medical home. Shortages of mental health professionals with pediatric expertise throughout the country, and, specifically, of child and adolescent psychiatrists nationwide, necessitate greater primary care pediatrician involvement in mental health care.

We greatly appreciate your willingness to work with us on the important provisions of your legislation that would enhance the ability of primary care pediatricians to provide mental health services in their practices and support other enhancements to community-based prevention, identification, and treatment of mental health conditions in children. Specifically, we thank you for including the grant program for co-locating mental health services in primary care and believe that this program, modeled after the National Network of Child Psychiatry Access Programs, could enhance the mental health services provided to children. We also applaud you for reauthorizing the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program and for including strong requirements that final regulations be issued by the end of this year carrying out the mental health parity requirements for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Many of the provisions in your legislation extend or enhance important programs for children such as the *Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act*, the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, and the school-based mental health initiative. Similarly, the bill address the important issue of Medicaid coverage of same-day mental health and primary care services which is vitally important for children.

We are pleased to support H.R. 4574, the *Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014* and we look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the mental health of all our nation's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James M. Perrin".

James M. Perrin, MD, FAAP
President

JMP/tmh