

Letter from the President: Chapter advocacy for children a marathon not a sprint

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Dr. DreyerThey say “all politics is local,” and this is especially true for many critical issues that affect children. From Medicaid funding and state requirements for school entry to paid family leave and immigrant child health, state-level advocacy by our chapters is crucial. Here are a few of our chapters’ recent accomplishments:

Florida Chapter

A little over 10 years ago, Florida parents and pediatricians sued the state for denying care to children. Nearly half the children in Florida’s Medicaid system had not had a well-child visit, and three-quarters of them had not received dental care. Children with broken bones were unable to find anyone to set them. And a 3-year-old boy with chronic tooth decay got to the point where he couldn’t eat because his mother couldn’t find a dentist who accepted Medicaid.

In April, our [Florida Chapter reached a settlement](#) in the class-action suit pediatricians brought on behalf of the 2 million children who depend on the state’s Medicaid program. The settlement requires Florida state agencies to substantially improve access to medical and dental care based on national norms. And it requires them to ensure children enrolled in the Medicaid program receive the medical and dental services to which they’re entitled by federal law. The state also agreed to improve outreach to low-income families to inform them of available Medicaid benefits and to increase provider participation and payment to ensure equal access.

Beginning with contracts effective Oct. 1, managed care plans will be required to offer board-certified pediatricians a reasonable opportunity to earn Medicare-equivalent payment rates.

Congratulations to our Florida Chapter leaders for getting the best deal for children and families they could!

California Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

California state Sen. Richard Pan, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, (a former AAP District IX vice chairperson) fought to raise falling vaccine rates by eliminating religious and personal belief exemptions from the vaccine mandates for schoolchildren. His efforts began in 2012 and relied on AAP California’s network of 5,000 pediatricians to write to legislators, testify at hearings and answer questions from lawmakers and reporters. It was not a fight for the faint-hearted. Dr. Pan and other vocal pediatricians became targets of bullying and

intimidation, but they stood together and stuck to the science. On June 30, 2015, [Gov. Jerry Brown signed Dr. Pan's bill into law](#). A great win for children's health!

Texas Chapter

The Texas Chapter and many individual pediatricians in Texas have been on the forefront of immigrant child health. Since the surge of unaccompanied minors and families with children from Central America seeking asylum in the U.S. began several years ago, the health of immigrant children has become a major issue. The Texas border is the main crossing point for these children and families, and pediatricians on the border provide much-needed health care and advocacy for them. The latest battle has been over the state licensing the large family detention centers in Texas for child care.

In April, the Texas Chapter testified against licensing the largest of these detention centers, South Texas Family Residential Center, for day care or residential care of children. Their testimony described the inadequate conditions, continued psychological trauma and lack of mental health services.

"The intrinsic nature of these facilities as incarceration and detention centers is not conducive to the emotional and developmental health of any child, much less highly traumatized children," said James L. Lukefahr, M.D., FAAP, a member of the chapter and the AAP Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect.

Put simply, children don't belong in jail. This will be another long journey, with wins and losses, but the Texas Chapter is up to the challenge.

These three chapters are exemplars of the amazing advocacy of all our chapters. AAP New York was instrumental in passing the best paid family leave program in the country. The North Carolina Chapter advocated for the repeal of the recently passed transgender bathroom law. And the Michigan Chapter has been heroic in its efforts to help the children of Flint affected by the water crisis. These efforts are marathons, not sprints, often requiring years of persistent efforts. Let's celebrate our chapters — both leaders and members — for all they do for children.