February 24, 2012

Advisory Committee to the Director
Diversity in Biomedical Research Working Group
Immediate Office of the Director
National Institutes of Health
One Center Drive, Room 114
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Members of the Advisory Committee to the Director:

As organizations that represent academic pediatricians who are dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children by promoting pediatric research and access to quality pediatric medical care, we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments to the Advisory Committee to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Working Group on Diversity in the Biomedical Research Workforce.

As pediatricians, we are very aware of the growing diversity of the United States population. The US Census Bureau projects that 45% of American children will belong to a racial or ethnic minority group by 2020, and pediatricians are on the ‘front lines’ of this demographic transition. We need to draw from all our youth to encourage the most talented to enter careers in science and medicine.

We applaud the NIH’s effort to study carefully the relationship of race, ethnicity, and NIH research awards and make the results publicly available. We fully support the effort to identify the factors that contribute to the lower number of research awards given to African American researchers, and to develop strategies to eliminate racial/ethnic disparities.

We recognize that the NIH has undertaken a variety of programs to promote diversity and that there are many mechanisms to support minority investigators. We agree with the approach outlined within the 2013 NIH budget request to undertake an evaluation of current training programs to identify the best approaches to supporting minority investigators. We hope that you will retain successful programs, such as the diversity supplement mechanism, which offers mentorship from R01-funded investigators and the National Institute of Mental Health’s (NIMH) African American Mental Health Research Scientist Grant Workshop.

As you continue your efforts to promote diversity, we ask that you consider the following factors:

1) Physician Scientists.

We strongly encourage the NIH to consider the important role that US physician scientists play within the research community. While we understand that there are
methodological considerations for the initial analysis of race, ethnicity, and research awards, we would like to encourage you to focus on physician researchers in the group of research awardees. Physician scientists provide clinical insights for basic science and translational research that are important for advancing patient care and medicine. Issues unique to physician scientists, such as large educational debt and the need to choose between careers in clinical care and research, make it challenging to pursue a research career, and succeed in research.

We especially encourage you to solicit feedback from young minority investigators who have recently applied or are anticipating applying for NIH funding. This group of investigators may provide insight into the barriers that are unique to minority investigators or of disproportionate importance. It is possible, for example, that minority investigators have a greater service burden at their institutions because there are relatively few minority investigators in the US, and these competing service demands may adversely impact the research productivity of minority researchers.

2) **Mentorship and Professional Societies.**

We strongly encourage the NIH to foster linkages with medical societies and professional organizations to develop partnership strategies to encourage diversity. Pediatric professional societies have existing opportunity structures that can help provide recognition, networking, and mentorship to young investigators as they build their careers. The Academic Pediatric Association’s New Century Scholars Program and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Harold Amos Medical Faculty Development Program are examples of existing approaches that focus on providing mentorship to minority investigators. Professional societies may also be able to play an important role in promoting federal resources for young scientists.

3) **General Pipeline of Physicians and Scientists.**

We also strongly encourage the NIH to maintain its commitment to the broader issues of increasing diversity in the scientific and medical workforce through activities such as the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) educational programs for youth beginning in the earliest years of their education. While the disparity in research awards is clearly of great concern, the paucity of African-American, Hispanic, Native-American, and Alaskan-native scientists is of equal or greater concern. We support your efforts to continue providing funding for programs aimed at developing math and science skills among minority youth from the earliest years of their education. We also support efforts (e.g., mentoring programs, funding opportunities) to encourage minority college students to participate in research programs that provide exposure and experience beginning in high school and college; to enter medicine, including in programs that combine MD with PhD, engineering and/or technology; to encourage minority medical students to develop research interests; to encourage minority residents to pursue research fellowships; and to encourage minority fellows to build academic research careers.
We appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments and recommendations concerning the diversity of scientific workforce and the Academic Pediatric Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Pediatric Society, Association of Medical School Department Chairs, and Society for Pediatric Research stand ready to assist NIH in considering ways that professional organizations can help to mentor future scientists from diverse backgrounds.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Pediatric Society
Association of Medical School Department Chairs
Society for Pediatric Research