

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 20, 2026

The Honorable Dr. Jay Bhattacharya
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Director Bhattacharya:

We write with great concern regarding the National Institute of Health's (NIH) budget cuts for contracts and extreme delays in Notices of Funding Opportunities and their impact on pediatric research, specifically the NIH's Pediatric Trials Network (PTN). We recently learned that, as part of these actions, the PTN is ending its promising clinical trial, the Pediatric Opportunistic Pharmacokinetic Study (POPS), which focuses on determining the right dose of dozens of medicines commonly used in children. Ending the POPS study will stop enrollment in 25 states and the testing of several dozen drugs in children: including premature infants, critically ill children, and obese children. Ending this study will also mean that children and their families who have already enrolled and donated blood samples for this important scientific effort will not see the trial's goal achieved. We urge NIH to reinstate the POPS study to prevent the irreplaceable loss of benefit of these precious blood samples from our most vulnerable populations.

The PTN was authorized by Congress in the Best Pharmaceuticals for Children Act (BPCA) (P.L. 107-109), bipartisan legislation that authorized \$25 million per year for trials of off-patent medicines and devices used in children. Since then, the PTN has developed into an NIH-funded consortium of over 100 clinical research sites across the United States dedicated to conducting studies on the safety, efficacy, and dosing of drugs and medical devices for children. It aims to improve pediatric medication labeling and reduce off-label prescribing in children and provides critical data on how medications act across developmental stages of childhood and adolescence. Currently, the infrastructure for the BPCA trials is supported by contracts. Thus, reductions in contract funding pose barriers to the BPCA implementation. Due to an arbitrary new rule concocted by the Trump administration, the "Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Cost Efficiency Initiative," created in response to Executive Order 14222, that institutes an agency-wide maximum contract spending cap for fiscal years (FY) 2025 and 2026, the BPCA trial funding was cut to substantially less than what has been authorized by Congress.

POPS provides infrastructure to support pediatric research at 33 sites in 25 states including Washington, New Jersey, and California. Until its recent cancellation, the study was investigating 60 medicines and had enrolled over 2,000 children. Due to its abrupt, unplanned termination, there are drugs for which the PTN will not be able to provide appropriate dosing information for one or more subgroups of children. Stopping this trial will diminish the value of irreplaceable blood samples donated by children and will prevent our ability to learn the safe dose of medicines routinely used to treat American children.

Cancelling this research doesn't save a dime, in fact it wastes millions of dollars of taxpayer money. Congress established the BPCA and appropriated the funding for this research. Now the Trump administration is forcing it to shut down, and throwing years of data and children's blood down the drain. Clinical trials aren't light switches - you can't turn this research on and off, and now lifesaving research for our kids is gone.

The National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) previously announced it was planning to support a unified pediatric research consortium. However, that potential effort was discussed

nearly a year ago at the NICHD's Advisory Council. To date, NIH has not released a Notice of Funding Opportunity, meaning that it will likely be years before awards are made and children are enrolled in approved trials. On top of the years it will take to get a unified pediatric research consortium up and running, the PTN was informed that there will be further cuts to the network in FY 2026 because NICHD was directed to reduce the amount of money they spend via contracts in compliance with the administration's Cost Efficiency Initiative rule.

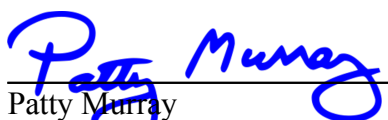
This is not the first time cuts to the PTN has been brought to your attention. In May, during the FY 2027 Budget Hearing before the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator Murray asked you about this very issue. When asked if you were aware that last year NIH's PTN received only part of its funding, you replied that you "were absolutely committed to making sure that we do have opportunities for children across the country to participate in clinical trials." But your actions are ripping away opportunities for children to participate in clinical trials and scientists' ability to learn from trials that could benefit all children. Your actions are squandering the investments previously made by NIH to secure data and specimens in a highly productive trial; and wasting the contributions of children and families participating in the POPS study.

This pediatric trial didn't have to end prematurely. It is just one example of a direct impact of the arbitrary decisions the Trump administration has made that are hurting our most vulnerable population - children. The contracts that support BPCA infrastructure received 40% less last year (FY 2025) than was received in 2024, and researchers were told by NIH that this year's funding (FY 2026) will be even less. Senator Murray warned you in May that "researchers at Seattle Children's were going to have stop their work investigating how pain medications could be safely used to help some of our sickest children as they face surgeries and hospitalization." Yet, here we are, in the exact place we feared we would be just a few months ago.

We urge you to do whatever is necessary to ensure full funding for the NIH's BPCA infrastructure for the PTN so the important work of the POPS trial and other vital research can move forward. This is not about a budget line—this is about keeping our kids safe and healthy. You cannot claim to be making American children healthier while shutting down the research that would do exactly that. We demand that you reverse this reckless decision immediately and explain your decision making to Congress and the families of the children who rely on this research.

CC: Russell Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget

Sincerely,


Patty Murray
United States Senator



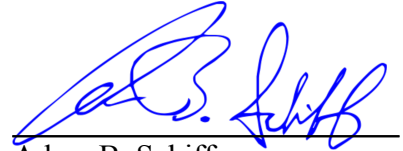
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator