Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you draft your Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to include $220 million for the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). This level of funding will help reverse more than a decade of sequestration and lost purchasing power for the agency that provides gold-standard public health and health care data, an essential and unbiased resource for policymakers at all levels of government. This investment is justified because more timely, detailed, and relevant data can help save lives, create jobs, and lower public and private sector costs.

The United States emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic with a profound understanding of the resources needed to mount a response to a severe public health emergency. To prepare for the next public health threat and ensure we make wise investments, we need access to high quality, granular data that demonstrate the impact of any public health threat in real time. Increased support for NCHS will ensure that our nation is better prepared to deal with future outbreaks, natural disasters, and national emergencies.

In recent years, NCHS has succeeded in providing critical information regarding the opioid epidemic and COVID-19 pandemic among other health concerns. However, we can better respond to these threats with a more modern data collection and analysis infrastructure. NCHS needs increased funding to support the improved timeliness, scope, quality, and usability of data on vital events, health care access and utilization, and population health. Additional resources are also critical to enhance the dissemination of data to meet the needs of a wide range of users, including policymakers at the state and local levels, as they act to create safer and healthier communities.

Hosted within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NCHS produces information on such topics as chronic disease prevalence, health disparities, teen pregnancy, infant mortality, disproportionate maternal mortality among African American women, emergency room use, causes of death, and rates of insurance through a set of efficient, multipurpose data collection systems. The datasets which produce this information are used across the federal government and play an essential part in making up the nation’s statistical and public health infrastructure. Stakeholders use this information for a wide range of purposes. For example, the Census Bureau develops population estimates and projections and the U.S. Department of Agriculture develops nutrition policies that guide multibillion dollar federal food assistance programs. Further, federal policymakers and health services researchers need this data to examine the state of our nation’s health and inform policy decisions.
Over the past decade, as our country has experienced numerous devastating public health crises, NCHS’s budget has lost ground to inflation. The agency has lost 19% of its purchasing power since FY 2010, preventing the agency from keeping up with technological advances and hindering its ability to meet growing data needs. NCHS urgently needs increased funding to maintain its high-quality, in-demand data products and take advantage of the emerging opportunities presented by more powerful processing tools and research advances.

With increased funding, NCHS could:

- **Collect the information needed to monitor health and health care and make it available when it is needed.** NCHS needs support for its new Rapid Surveys System to collect time-sensitive data on emerging public health topics, attitudes, and behaviors to meet decision makers’ needs. In addition, NCHS will build on its existing strong data collection systems by adopting new data collection methodologies and targeting new data sources, including electronic health records, that will expand the range of information available along with more timely data release. It will also support the modernization of states’ vital records systems, including electronic death registration and medical examiner case management systems.

- **Better understand the health of our nation, including such health disparities as those between rural and urban areas, to inform policies to improve our health and ameliorate these disparities.** By significantly expanding the NCHS Data Linkage Program across the Department of Health and Human Services and other government data holdings, NCHS could considerably improve the understanding provided by its data. NCHS has demonstrated the benefit in linking survey and vital registration data with CMS, SSA, and HUD data holdings, but has lacked the requisite support to take full advantage of these resources. By crosslinking among such data sets, as well as to economic, transportation, food, and education data sets, we could better understand our nation’s health and other social determinants.

- **Expand data on underserved communities, such as rural areas.** With increased resources, NCHS could expand the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on underserved communities. NCHS data systems already allow for data to be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, income, veteran status, and other key demographic variables. However, sample sizes limit the ability to show data with the needed granularity on these characteristics and to combine characteristics needed to define the most marginalized groups. In addition to an expansion in data collection to address disparities, disseminations modalities will also be expanded to make the information more accessible to policy makers as well as other users.

- **Save lives through a better understanding of death.** With more support for its Collaborating Office for Medical Examiners and Coroners, NCHS could help improve the quality of the death certificate information by providing these offices with guidance and other support, facilitating vital records sharing with jurisdictions, and advancing the timeliness of data through research, staffing, and systems development.

Increased investment in NCHS will allow the agency to take better advantage of its expertise and become a nimble 21st century statistical agency. Funding NCHS at $220 million in FY25 is supported by a wide range of
organizations representing public health, health care providers, researchers, state health officials, patient advocates, and more.

Thank you again for your attention to our request. With your support, NCHS will continue to shape our understanding of Americans' health with objective, relevant, accurate, and timely information.

Sincerely,

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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