Late last week, the Wisconsin Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee voted on its 2023-2025 biennial budget priorities, excluding some that have a clear impact on threaten the health and well-being of children and families in the state. As Wisconsin pediatricians and as an organization, we support crucial upstream investments that would strengthen the foundational mental health of all children.

We applaud and support these improvements:

- **Medicaid reimbursement rate increase for primary care**: Bringing the payment rate to 70% of Medicare for evaluation management and procedure codes begins to close the gap in parity for pediatric care costs.
- **Mental health crisis/urgent care and observation facilities**: Addressing access issues statewide for individuals with pressing behavioral health needs.

We urge immediate and urgent reconsideration on these measures:

- **Provide post-partum Medicaid coverage for individuals to 12 months**: 42 US states have implemented or plan to implement this provision, which improves maternal health and coverage stability, especially where disparities exist.
- **Continue child care supports, including Child Care Counts**: Child care programs operate on razor-thin margins, resulting is low compensation for childcare professionals threatening the viability of what are largely community-based small businesses that make it possible for parents to work. Proposed provider supports have been replaced with a $15M unspecified loan program, which does not address underlying issues.
- **Commit to mental health supports for young children**: Despite high levels of need and strong widespread recommendations for implementation, the current proposal makes no provision to fund infant and early childhood mental health consultation ($8.79M).
- **Support physician/patient relationships**: Physicians must have the ability freedom to discuss all science-based options with patients, regardless of type of insurance—including support for consideration for appropriate gender affirming care, puberty blockers and body dysmorphia.
- **Grow successful Family Foundations Home Visiting programs**: Evidence-based home visiting models foster educational development and school-readiness and play a role in preventing child abuse and neglect over the long-term.

With the final vote coming up this week, we urge Wisconsin lawmakers to take action in restoring measures to support the current and future health of citizens of all ages in our state. These investments will result in creating conditions that will reduce future costs on the state of Wisconsin, and contribute to a thriving, flourishing, and healthy populace.