Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 10, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

While you assume your responsibilities at an incredibly challenging period in our nation's history, we ask for your consideration of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, an effort for which the United States has provided considerable financial and political leadership, and which is poised for completion during your term in office. Once eradicated, polio would only be the second disease, next to smallpox, to ever reach this status.

Polio eradication is a cost-effective public health investment, as its benefits accrue forever. More than 10 million children will be paralyzed in the next 40 years if the world fails to capitalize on the more than $6 billion already invested in polio eradication. Once polio has been eradicated, the world will reap substantial financial, as well as humanitarian, dividends due to foregone polio treatment and rehabilitation costs. Depending on national decisions on the future use of polio vaccines, these savings could exceed $1 billion per year.

The polio eradication initiative is one of the largest, most successful public-private health initiatives ever undertaken. The tremendous progress made in the fight against polio would not be possible without the financial and political commitment of the United States. The U.S. is the leading public sector donor to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative with contributions to date totaling nearly $1.5 billion. These funds support the technical leadership of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and also the Polio Eradication Initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development. It is imperative that polio eradication remain a priority of the U.S. Government in order to ensure that the rest of the world continues to make a commitment to this important endeavor.

As a result of this global effort, two billion children have been immunized, five million spared disability and over 250,000 deaths have been averted from polio. Polio incidence has been reduced by more than 99%, however until the world is polio-free, every child, even those in the United States, is at risk. Only four countries still have indigenous transmission of wild polio virus: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. We must complete polio eradication, or face the prospect of returning to a world in which thousands of children that could have been protected through the simplest of all health interventions, administration of oral polio vaccine, are needlessly subjected to life-long disability, suffering and poverty.

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The United States' polio eradication effort has enjoyed broad bi-partisan support from Congress and also from the past two presidential administrations. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is a model of effective public/private cooperation, and could be a model for more complex health initiatives.

Our country is in a unique position to influence the achievement of this goal. We respectfully request you to continue the United States' leadership by highlighting polio eradication among your international public health priorities, maintaining the United States' investment in polio eradication in the Federal budget, and by urging the leaders in the remaining polio endemic countries of Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan, to intensify their efforts to achieve polio eradication.

Mr. President, with your leadership, the goal of a polio free world for children of all future generations will soon become a reality.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress

JOE WILSON
Member of Congress

MAURICE HINCHEY
Member of Congress

STEVE COHEN
Member of Congress

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