March 31, 2015

To the Honorable Chairmen and Members
Joint Committee on Revenue:

Re: H. 62 “An Act to Support Working Families
   H. 2479 “An Act Improving the Earned Income Credit for Working Families”
   H. 2563 “An Act Relative to the Earned Income Tax Credit”

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP) which represents approximately 1,800 pediatricians across the Commonwealth. The members of the MCAAP are physicians dedicated to improving the quality of life for children by providing quality health care and advocating for them and their families. The MCAAP is committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental and social health for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

In response to the growing number of children living in poverty and the increasing number of low-income households in the United States, the American Academy of Pediatrics has focused its advocacy on poverty and child health. The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics submits this testimony in support of legislation to increase the state’s Earned Income Tax Credit for low and moderate wage workers.

Poverty and low socioeconomic status are significant determinants of child health. Children living near, at, or below the poverty line have worse health and are at greater risk for development delay, asthma, ear infections, obesity, behavioral health problems, and child abuse and neglect. Infant mortality is higher amongst the poor and near poor. Child Poverty also adversely impacts health access across the life span and into adulthood.

As pediatricians, we see the impact of poverty on our patients and their families. This is not limited to urban or rural practices. It is an issue seen throughout the state, including suburban communities. Think about the struggle of low-income working families to make ends meet, to provide safe housing, food and other necessities for their children. Such stress affects the physical and mental health of both parents and children and impedes children’s abilities to learn while in school and sometimes, even stay in school at all.

As a society, we need to do better to help low-income working families make ends meet and provide for their children. There is much that should be done, but we can start now by giving a boost to these families by increasing the state’s earned income tax credit (EITC).

Research by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found a strong association between EITC participation and mother’s receiving prenatal care. This improves both maternal health and infant health (fewer children born at low weights). Also, children in families receiving EITC support have shown higher test scores, especially in elementary and middle schools, and higher high school graduation rates.
The MCAAP urges the Committee to increase the earned income tax credit to help low income working families who are struggling in this high cost of living state. At the same time, we urge the Committee not to reduce the social safety net to fund the tax credit.

Sincerely,

Michael McManus, M.D., MPH, FAAP
President, the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics