

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

CHILDREN AND SCREENS: INSTITUTE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHILDREN AND SCREENS INSTITUTE ENDORSES PROPOSED FEDERAL ACT FOR RESEARCHING MEDIA IMPACTS AS “AN IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD”

New bipartisan legislation would authorize and fund a National Institutes of Health program to study the effects of media on child development. Leading national children’s media health non-profit supports this bill, but calls for technology and media companies to match the federal government’s proposed investment in this NIH effort.

LONG ISLAND, NY, August 23, 2018 – Newly introduced federal legislation – the Children and Media Research Advancement (“CAMRA”) Act – calls for the National Institutes of Health to study how traditional and digital media affect infants, children, and adolescents; to fund such research by others; and to report to Congress on this subject. Long Island, NY-based Children and Screens, a leading children’s media health nonprofit, confirmed today that it has endorsed the CAMRA Act. Children and Screens’ founder and President, Dr. Pamela Hurst-Della Pietra, called it “an important step forward in our effort to truly understand, and appropriately balance, the benefits and risks of media for all children.”

Children and Screens has long advocated for more NIH leadership in childhood media effects research. As Dr. Hurst Della-Pietra explained, “Promoting informed public dialogue about media health policy is an important part of our organization’s work. Last year, with input from experts in many fields, Children and Screens prepared and widely circulated a Policy Brief summarizing legislative priorities in this field. Staffers for two CAMRA Act co-sponsors, Sens. Markey and Schatz, were among those with whom we shared that Policy Brief. Children and Screens is pleased to see many of our recommendations reflected in their bill. Of course, a community of people and organizations called for this kind of legislation, and participated in its drafting and

review. We look forward to working closely with them to define, pursue, and achieve our shared goals.”

Children and Screens’ generally positive view of the CAMRA Act is tempered by concern over funding for the new NIH program. The Act calls for three years of federal funding at \$15 million a year, and two more years at \$25 million. Dr. Hurst-Della Pietra believes that more will be needed. “Consider the magnitude of NIH’s mandate under the CAMRA Act. Just designing, executing, analyzing, and reporting on a national, multi-center, multidisciplinary, longitudinal study of media effects on children from birth through late adolescence will be a major undertaking. We’re talking about deeply investigating phenomena that affect millions of American families. In that context, \$95 million over five years seems inadequate. NIH will need more. We are developing a proposal for those who profit most directly from children’s media exposure – technology and media companies – to contribute matching funds to the NIH effort. That proposal will be an important topic of conversation at the upcoming *Digital Media and Developing Minds* National Congress.” Children and Screens and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory will be co-sponsoring that event on October 15-18, 2018.

As to whether the CAMRA Act is likely to become law, Dr. Hurst-Della Pietra described herself as “cautiously optimistic”. “We are aware,” she said, “that similar bills have been introduced before. We hope that this time, mounting evidence from our members and others will persuade Congress and the White House to act. The prospect of media always and everywhere is not an issue for tomorrow’s children. It is the reality for children today. This situation presents parents, teachers, doctors, and children themselves with unprecedented choices to make about media health. They cannot make good choices without more and better information. That’s why ambitious, rigorous, coordinated research under NIH leadership is indispensable.”

Members of Children and Screens National Scientific Advisory Board shared Dr. Hurst-Della Pietra’s overall view of the CAMRA Act. Dr. Dimitri Christakis (Editor of *JAMA Pediatrics*; Director of the Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development at the Seattle Children’s Research Institute; and George Adkins Professor of Pediatrics, Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry, and Adjunct Professor of Health Services at the University of Washington), noted, “Since its inception, Children and Screens has been advocating for and supporting desperately needed research to help children lead healthy lives in a digital world. I am delighted and excited to learn that Congress is considering legislation to support this extraordinarily important mission.”

Dr. Elizabeth Englander, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University, was similarly enthusiastic about the CAMRA Act. She said, “Digital technology, the use of social media, gaming, and other communication technologies have profoundly affected children, and this legislation is a critical first step in ensuring that our children grow up healthy and well prepared for adulthood.”

Dr. Sandra Calvert, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Children's Digital Media Center at Georgetown University, also supported Children and Screens' endorsement of the CAMRA Act. She observed, "Our children's lives are embedded in digital media. Supporting the CAMRA bill is a wise investment for our nation, as research in the digital media area can educate us about how to provide a safe pathway for our children's development in our rapidly changing 21st century digital landscape."

About Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development: Children and Screens (more formally, Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development) is a nonprofit organization devoted to maximizing children's benefits, and minimizing their risks, from digital media. For more than five years, it has pursued answers to fundamental questions about the influence of media exposure on children's prospects for happy, healthy, and productive lives. Children and Screens is best known for convening thought leaders from diverse fields, and for promoting, funding, and disseminating their multidisciplinary research. Most recently, in January 2018, Children and Screens joined with the National Institute of Child Health and Development to organize and host a scientific workshop on Media Exposure and Early Child Development.

Children and Screens previously organized and sponsored the publication of *Children, Adolescents and Screens: What We Know and What We Need to Learn*. That stand-alone supplement to *Pediatrics* (the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics) presented 22 articles, from over 100 named authors, and provided parents, practitioners, researchers and policy makers with a uniquely comprehensive view of this field.

Children, Adolescents and Screens was a direct result of the first *Digital Media and Developing Minds* conference, which Children and Screens co-sponsored in 2015 with the Sackler Colloquia program of the National Academy of Sciences. That groundbreaking gathering brought together nearly 200 leading researchers, clinicians, and other experts in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, communications, education, public health, and public policy. The next *Digital Media and Developing Minds* National Congress, co-sponsored by Children and Screens and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, will be held on October 15-18, 2018.

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