



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

909 N. Washington St., Suite 400 | Alexandria, VA 22314 | T: 703 535-3885 | F: 703 535-3904 | www.FirstFocus.net

June 14, 2007

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller, IV
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Olympia Snowe
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Rockefeller, Snowe and Kennedy:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, to thank you for your leadership in introducing the CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2007, (S.1224), legislation that to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), providing new resources to maintain coverage for those already enrolled in SCHIP and expanding the program to improve coverage for children in families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to purchase private health coverage. As an organization committed to ensuring that all of our nation's children have access to affordable health coverage, SCHIP reauthorization is our leading priority this year. We are grateful for your bill, which not only maintains coverage for those who are currently enrolled in the program but which also expands SCHIP to cover millions more. The CHIP Reauthorization Act would be a significant step toward the goal of achieving universal coverage for our nation's most precious national resource, our children.

We are particularly grateful for inclusion of several provisions in your bill which will go a long way toward reducing barriers to coverage currently facing low-income families across the nation, specifically those which:

- Expand coverage at state option to legal immigrant children, pregnant women and children of state employees.
- Add new requirement to make dental and mental health services a guaranteed benefit.
- Give states the option/flexibility to determine how best to establish citizenship and which also incorporates other elements of S. 909 to clarify the reasonable opportunity period, provide retroactive and restoration of eligibility; and ensures that criteria can be no more restrictive than that of the Social Security Administration.
- Strengthen quality of care and health outcomes of children.
- Provide \$25 million a year from FY 2008-2012 for childhood obesity demonstration grants.
- Require an IOM report on children's access to health care.

As a leading voice in SCHIP reauthorization to improve coverage for the 6 million children who are currently eligible but unenrolled in SCHIP or Medicaid, First Focus is especially grateful that your bill includes important provisions to enroll qualified uninsured children into Medicaid and SCHIP by allowing for streamlined "Express Lane" enrollment processes. Specifically, we appreciate the provisions

in your bill that would give states the option to expedite enrollment of eligible children by:

- Granting income-eligibility for Medicaid or SCHIP when another public program has already found that the family has an income low enough to qualify for health coverage -- whether or not the other program uses a different income-finding methodology;
- Providing federal resources to develop the hardware and software needed to facilitate the exchange of electronic data among federal programs;
- Allowing states to access publicly-held data to determine children's eligibility rather than delaying or denying health coverage by making families complete duplicative paperwork; and
- Using other programs' findings to expedite the determination of eligibility factors other than income.

It is estimated that the employment of Express Lane strategies could improve coverage for more than 70 percent of low-income, uninsured children, all of whom live in families already receiving benefits through Food Stamps, free or reduced price school lunch, and/or nutrition programs for women, infants and children. Your bill would go a long way to help shrink the uninsured rolls for eligible children across the nation. As the Senate Finance Committee moves toward markup we urge you to revise the language to more closely track the bipartisan legislation that was introduced by Senators Lugar and Bingaman (S. 1213).

While we appreciate the inclusion of the provision in your bill to make dental and mental health services a guaranteed benefit, we urge you to consider adding the language included in the Children's Dental Health Improvement Act, S. 739, legislation introduced by Senators Bingaman and Cochran that would allow SCHIP to act as a wrap-around secondary payer for dental and mental health services in SCHIP, just as in Medicaid and Medicare.

Finally, we commend you for your efforts to address flaws in the current SCHIP funding formula. We agree that the current formula for allocating precious SCHIP resources among the states is imperfect but we are hopeful that any formula changes pursued in reauthorization will ensure that funding follows the children, reflecting a state's actual population of uninsured children. In addition, because it is difficult for states to predict to a certainty future SCHIP enrollment and, therefore, expenditures, it is important that any formula change take into consideration that states may vary in how quickly they are able to utilize new federal SCHIP resources and that that low-income children in states which require a longer ramp up time should not be penalized.

We appreciate your leadership and indeed all of your efforts to ensure that all children across our nation have access to the health care they need. We look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to address the health care needs of our nation's children.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President