

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**MISSOURI LEADERS & CHILDREN'S
HEALTH EXPERTS URGE SUPPORT FOR
THE STATE CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM**

Diverse advocates call on federal lawmakers to reauthorize and adequately fund popular insurance program for Missouri's vulnerable kids

Columbia, MO – Some of the most prominent organizations and individuals in Missouri today to urge Congress and the White House to support the reauthorization and funding of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

At issue is the fate of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) – known as MC+ for Kids in Missouri. For the past 10 years, SCHIP has provided health coverage to kids whose parents are either not offered health insurance for their family through their job, or who cannot afford the coverage that is offered. More than 6 million children nationwide and nearly 107,000 in Missouri are covered by SCHIP, making it one of the nation's few health care success stories. While the number of uninsured adults continues to climb, SCHIP programs have helped reduce the percentage of uninsured children by 24 percent over the past decade.

"America's future is in the hands of our children. Their ability to achieve and succeed in life is greatly influenced by their health," said Ted Groshong, M.D., chairman, Department of Child Health, Pediatric Nephrology at the University of Missouri Health Care. "The SCHIP program is vital to the health and well-being of children. Every day I see first hand the tremendous impact SCHIP makes. The investment we make in SCHIP today will be paid back many times over in a healthier future for our kids."

Congress must reauthorize SCHIP before the end of September in order for the program to continue. Experts say the current funding levels – set in 1997 – are not adequate to keep up with the number of uninsured kids, so it will take an increase in federal funding to cover children currently enrolled in these programs, with more money needed to cover additional uninsured children.

"Far too many kids in Missouri and across the nation are uninsured and do not receive the care they need," said Rep. LeVota, speaking at a press conference in Columbia. "SCHIP has been a successful partnership between the federal government and the state, and we want it to continue and grow. Covering as many uninsured kids as possible in Missouri should be the focus in Washington and in Jefferson City."

The most recent statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau suggest nearly 127,000 children are uninsured in Missouri. The vast majority have parents who work. Nationwide, more than 9 million children have no health insurance – more than the total number of kids enrolled in first and second grades in U.S. public schools. Most of these children would likely be eligible for low-cost or free coverage under SCHIP.

Other participants in today's press conference included Beth Griffin, executive director for Citizens for Missouri's Children and Lynette Nickleberry, graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia and mother of two children enrolled in SCHIP.

"My sons, who are eight and 14 years old, are able to receive the preventive care and prescriptions they need because they are enrolled in MC+ for Kids, said Lynette Nickleberry, a graduate student at the University of Missouri Columbia and a working parent. "My younger son has medical conditions that require ongoing treatment, medication and monitoring. Thanks to SCHIP, he is a normal, active child." Nickleberry expects to earn her Ph.D. in human development and family studies in 2009 and teach at the college level.

Today's press conference was part of *Cover the Uninsured*, a national effort of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, designed to focus on the health coverage needs of Americans. Throughout the month, similar events are planned across the nation to raise awareness of the importance of SCHIP.

"Polls show that most Americans support the continuation and expansion of SCHIP," said Beth Griffin, executive director of Citizens for Missouri's Children. "Children need access to health care in order to succeed in school, which in turn helps them succeed in life."

For more information on SCHIP and the events taking place this month, go to www.CoverTheUninsured.org.

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