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For more information contact:

Amy Blouin, Executive Director, 314-518-8867

Ruth Ehresman, Director of Budgetary & Health Policy, 314-504-3616

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Missouri's Congressional Delegation Should Support Children's Health Insurance Expansion

*Vote on SCHIP bill expected next week;
President says he will veto legislation if passed*

The Missouri Budget Project is calling on Missouri's senators and representatives to support the bipartisan agreement emerging in the U.S. Congress to renew and strengthen the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SHIP).

The House and Senate are expected to take action on SCHIP legislation during the week of September 24. President Bush has indicated he will veto the legislation if passed; the SCHIP program is set to expire September 30.

"SCHIP has helped our country cut the number of uninsured low-income children by one-third over the past decade. While the emerging agreement in Congress falls short of providing health coverage for every child who needs it, the SCHIP reauthorization legislation is a major step forward," said Amy Blouin, Executive Director of the Missouri Budget Project, a fiscal analysis organization.

“In light of the Administration’s frequent threats to veto SCHIP legislation, Congress needs to approve the agreement by large majorities,” Blouin said. “That will send the White House a strong message that Congress is committed to improving children’s health coverage and that the President should not block this historic bipartisan agreement.”

SCHIP—known as MC Plus for Kids in Missouri—currently covers 107,000 low-income children in Missouri. U.S. Census Bureau figures released in August indicate that 127,000 Missouri children are uninsured. “If Congress passes increased funding for SCHIP, thousands more Missouri children will receive health coverage,” said Kerri McBee, Missouri Budget Project Outreach Coordinator.

More than 6.6 million children were covered by SCHIP nationally during the past year. Roughly 9 million American children lack health coverage, according to the most recent Census figures. The number of uninsured children has risen for the last two years in part because of a growing shortage of federal SCHIP funds.

States use SCHIP funds, as well as their own required contributions, to provide health care to children whose families make too little to afford private insurance. “Most families with children enrolled in SCHIP pay a monthly premium. The parents of these children work but are unable to purchase insurance due to its extraordinarily high cost,” McBee said.

The Missouri Budget Project is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that informs the public about the state’s budgetary and tax policy options and their impact on low-income Missourians.