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Reauthorization of SCHIP Advances in Congress

Heather Lasher Todd, Communications Director

The State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP, provides health insurance to millions of low and middle income children across the nation and in Missouri. It covers children whose parents earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid and do not have access to affordable health insurance for their families through their employers. In October 2008, 63,399 Missouri children were insured through SCHIP.¹

During these challenging economic times, SCHIP is more important than ever in assuring all of America's children have access to the health and dental care they need to be able to learn and grow. Congress is currently working on a reauthorization and strengthening of this critical program to meet the needs of America's families during the economic downturn. The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a reauthorization bill and the Senate is expected to consider it on the floor this week.

What's Included in the Reauthorization Bill:

The bill passed by the House was based largely on the first version of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007 ("CHIPRA 1"), which renews the SCHIP program and increases its funding; establishes a new initiative to enroll millions of already-eligible uninsured children in Medicaid and SCHIP; and launches a new child health quality program.

The House plan also includes the Legal Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA), which would eliminate the 5-year ban that currently prevents states from covering legally present immigrant children.

The bill will be paid for with a 61 cent federal tobacco tax increase.

¹ Division of MO HealthNet Monthly Report

The Next Steps for SCHIP Bills:

The Senate Finance Committee marked up its version of the SCHIP reauthorization package recently, and during that time the ICHIA provision was added by amendment. Senate floor action will begin this week and is expected to continue into next week.

Once the Senate passes its version of the SCHIP bill, the legislation will go to a conference of the House and Senate to resolve any remaining differences in the House and Senate bills.

What You Can Do:

With state budgets in shambles and more families needing help than ever before, it is critical that the SCHIP reauthorization be approved quickly. States will be unable to move forward in covering more children if they are uncertain as to the federal government's long-term commitment to SCHIP.

Please call Missouri Senators Bond (202.224.5721) and McCaskill (202.224.6154) and encourage them to vote in favor of the critical SCHIP Reauthorization package being considered this week in the U.S. Senate. Ask them to vote against any weakening amendments, particularly regarding legal immigrant children.

Thanks to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities for the background information in this alert.

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