

June 27, 2007

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell, Ranking Member Barton, and Members of the Committee on Energy and Commerce:

The undersigned organizations are writing to ask that you reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and maintain flexibility for states to cover parents.

There has been bipartisan support for covering parents throughout SCHIP's history since the program was enacted in 1997 to target low-income children in families who did not qualify for Medicaid but could not afford private health insurance. States that met certain benchmarks in covering children were encouraged by both the Clinton and Bush Administrations to expand coverage to low-income parents.

The strategy worked. Currently, SCHIP provides health insurance coverage to approximately 300,000 parents who cannot otherwise access coverage through public insurance or their employers. This represents a small percentage of the program's 7.4 million total enrollees. Yet opponents of family-based coverage in SCHIP have been threatening to deny states flexibility to cover low-income parents, leaving them with no viable alternatives for obtaining health care coverage.

Covering low-income parents through SCHIP not only benefits the parents, it also is critical to ensuring that families stay healthy. Children whose parents have health insurance are more likely to enroll in public health insurance programs, access health care themselves, and take advantage of preventive health care services. Parents with health care are also better able to stay in the work force and have the means to care for their families. Dr. Mark B. McClellan, former Administrator of the Center of Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) for the Bush Administration has acknowledged the importance of parents' coverage to children's health: "Extending coverage to parents and caretakers not only serves to cover additional uninsured individuals, but it may also increase the likelihood that they will take the steps necessary to enroll their children." States with family care coverage programs, including New Jersey, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, have shown this to be the case. Research in those states indicates that covered parents enroll their children, ensure that children receive care, and stay enrolled in the program.

Denying states the flexibility to cover parents would represent a major step backward. We ask that you support SCHIP reauthorization and continue to give states the latitude they need to ensure healthy families by allowing parents to receive health insurance coverage under SCHIP. Thank you for your consideration.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Network of Community Options and Resources

American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Black Women's Health Imperative
Child Welfare League of America
Coalition on Human Needs
Consumers Union
Easter Seals
Families USA
First Focus
HIV Medicine Association
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Black Nurses Association
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Institute for Reproductive Health
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Partnership for Women and Families
National Research Center for Women and Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office
RESULTS
Service Employees International Union
The Children's Health Fund
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women of Reform Judaism