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July 25, 2007

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chair
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell:

The Children's Dental Health Project commends your efforts to address the comprehensive health care needs of children by endorsing the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act. In particular, we applaud your leadership in addressing the oral health needs of our nation's children by including a federal dental benefit and other important dental provisions. The inclusion of the basic dental benefit reaffirms that oral health is critical to the overall health of a child, and not an "optional" service. Your proposal will stabilize access to appropriate dental care for children in working poor families.

State experiences demonstrate that with consistent dental benefits, SCHIP markedly improves dental care and oral health outcomes. However, without essential dental care we run the risk of jeopardizing the future of children like Deamonte Driver, a 12 year old Maryland child who died earlier this year after complications from a tooth abscess. Dental caries, the disease that causes cavities, remains the single most common chronic disease. And the situation is worsening. For the first time in 40 years it is on the rise among preschool aged children, according to the CDC. A stable SCHIP benefit, extending provisions for the safety-net, and providing early parent education on dental caries will help to reverse this trend by preventing disease and providing services that cost far less than care delivered in emergency rooms.

Your commitment to reporting requirements will also improve the quality of SCHIP-funded dental care. Through state reporting, it will be possible to track and potentially enhance the impact of the dental benefit.

Thank you for your dedication to improving the health of our nation's children. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Burt Edelstein, DDS, MPH
Founding Director

Give
Us A
Helping
Hand

