



Children's Health Fund

July 17, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Ted Kennedy
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions Committee

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Chairman
House Energy and Commerce Committee

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Chairman
House Ways and Means Committee

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND FACSIMILE

Dear Chairmen,

Planning for our nation's future has never been harder, and we at the Children's Health Fund commend you for putting forth comprehensive health care reform legislation from your respective committees. CHF supports health reform that provides universal health insurance coverage for all children, shores up the health care workforce and promotes the medical home model of care.

By our analysis, your plans support each of those principles, and we strongly support the inclusion of many provisions in the final bill that is eventually voted on and passed by Congress. However, we do have some concerns with the proposals that we would like to bring to your attention as well.

CHF Supports:

- Medicaid and CHIP eligibility expansion and continued strengthening of the health care safety net, including maintaining coverage for Medicaid and CHIP eligible or enrolled children, especially during health care reform transition.
- Elimination of state option to use face-to-face interviews to determine Medicaid eligibility, requiring states to implement 12-month continuous eligibility, and extending automatic renewal and Express Lane renewal to all Medicaid beneficiaries as outlined in proposal.
- Presumptive eligibility for children for Medicaid and CHIP.

- Eliminating the pre-existing condition exclusion option for private health plans.
- Requiring insurers who offer coverage to dependents to allow such dependant to stay on parents' policies until age 26.
- A public health insurance option as a way to ensure children have an insurance option that includes an ideal set of pediatric benefits.
- Increased funding for the National Health Service Corps and other ways of incentivizing practicing primary care in medically underserved areas, such as new scholarship and loan programs to build a primary care and public health workforce specifically in HPSAs and other designated shortage areas.
- Increased funding for Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- Interstate coordination for child Medicaid beneficiaries, as found in the Senate Finance plan, this is especially critical in times of disaster when children and families may cross state lines to avoid natural disasters.
- Increasing reimbursement rates under the Medicaid program to be on par with Medicare rates, thus supporting the fiscal health of the currently fragile health care safety net and putting children's health care on par with adult health care.
- Efforts to implement a medical home pilot programs that provide individuals with direct and ongoing access to primary care, coordinate care, provide for all patient's needs or take responsibility for appropriate care, provide continuous access to care and communication, integrate readily accessible, useful information, and implements evidence based practices.
- Prevention and wellness initiatives.
- Establishment of standards in health information technology, especially as it concerns pediatric health records.

CHF Concerns:

- CHF supports the individual mandate to have health insurance put forth in the Senate and House proposals as we support universal coverage for all children. However, the language in the HELP bill does not appear certain that families are mandated to purchase coverage for their children. Thus, coverage of all children may not be achieved if this language is not addressed.
- CHF supports Medicaid eligibility expansion and advocates for the support of the health care safety net, including maintaining coverage for currently Medicaid and CHIP eligible or enrolled children, during health care reform transition. However, CHF is concerned with removal of income disregards proposed in the Senate Finance Committee proposal. This provision would be a set back for scores of low-income families who rely on Medicaid and would place a new barrier to coverage for vulnerable children.
- CHF supports expanding access to health insurance for all Americans through the establishment of a Health Information Exchange or Gateway. However, CHF believes the Exchange should not be applied to children until it is proven to provide access to health insurance policies with comprehensive benefit packages. CHF is concerned that the Exchange does not include sufficient safeguards to ensure comprehensive coverage for children.
- CHF urges Congress to ensure that no child would lose benefits or access to services as a result of changes to the CHIP program particularly as described in the House

proposal. Populations such as foster children, older adolescents and others in non-traditional settings may be impacted by these transitions. Additionally, children with access to EPSDT in Medicaid-expansion states funded with CHIP dollars should not lose access to those services as a result of moving to Exchange plans.

- CHF supports affordability credits for families, as described in the House bill. However, CHF is concerned that children with no documented members in their families may be ineligible for credits. Children do not choose whether to follow their parents to this country. There are serious public health ramifications to situations where children are not vaccinated for communicable diseases, or have other unaddressed health care needs in the home, school or community.
- CHF is encouraged that the Congressional proposals acknowledge pediatric benefits however CHF believes all the bills need to be strengthened in order to ensure the unique needs of children are included. CHF encourages Congress to establish a separate pediatric council charged with defining essential benefits for children. Additionally, CHF supports the addition of oral health and mental health services in the list of mandated services, to foster the adoption of the enhanced medical home model of care for children. At minimum, the standards should meet or exceed current EPSDT standards. CHF also supports the inclusion of well baby and well child care oral health, vision, and hearing services, equipment, and supplies at least for children under 21 years of age in the standards for the essential benefits.

Thank you for your leadership in health care reform. We hope you will take these concerns into account as legislative details are finalized and look forward to supporting your efforts.

Sincerely,



Irwin Redlener, MD
Co-Founder and President
Children's Health Fund

CC: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Harry Reid
The Honorable Chris Dodd
White House Office of Health Reform
Secretary Kathleen Sebelius