



March 13, 2007

The Honorable Chairman Dingell
Chair, Committee on Education and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2215

Dear Chairman Dingell:

On behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), I write to thank you for your leadership in introducing *The Children's Health First Act*, a bold and innovative approach to ensuring access to health coverage for all children. This bill comes at a critical time when 47 million people are uninsured, including 9 million children. Despite the successes of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Medicaid in improving children's access to health care, over 60 percent of uninsured children are currently eligible for SCHIP but not enrolled. For this reason, we support efforts to increase state options to reduce the number of uninsured children.

The Children's Health First Act provides incentives to states to make health care coverage more affordable for families. At a time when employer-sponsored health plans on average cost more than a full-time minimum wage worker earns in a year, it is vital that Congress and states develop options to make quality, affordable health coverage a reality for working families.

In the nearly ten years since SCHIP was developed, we have learned some very valuable lessons and "best practices" around outreach and enrollment (i.e. simplified eligibility, continuous enrollment, etc). We are happy to see these best practices encouraged in *The Children's Health First Act*. These best practices should remain an important component of SCHIP as it is reauthorized this year and be part of any state-based coverage and reform initiatives.

SCHIP is a Federal-State partnership and we applaud this bill for bolstering this partnership by providing states with significantly more federal resources to cover additional children. However, governors and state legislators cannot expand coverage if the Administration or Congress is also reducing Medicaid spending and shifting costs to states. SEIU urges you to reject the Bush Administration's proposed cuts to Medicaid.

The reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program is the best opportunity Congress has in 2007 to build a foundation for more comprehensive health reform. By enacting *The Children's Health First Act*, Congress would offer real hope to the millions of working families who are struggling with high health care costs, stagnant wages, and growing economic insecurity. We appreciate Chairman Dingell's introduction of *The Children's Health First Act*, this bill is a critical first step in guaranteeing every member in our society access to quality, affordable health care.

Sincerely,

Anna Burger
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