



March
of Dimes
Saving babies, together

Office of Government Affairs
1146 19th Street, NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone (202) 659-1800
Fax (202) 296-2964

March 13, 2007

The Honorable John Dingell
Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell:

On behalf of more than 3 million volunteers and 1,400 staff members of the March of Dimes Foundation, I want to thank you for sponsoring the Children's Health First Act, legislation designed to expand health insurance coverage for women and children.

The Foundation's mission to prevent birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality can best be fulfilled if pregnant women, infants and children have the health coverage that enables them to receive essential health services when they need them. According to the Institute of Medicine, health insurance is the single most important factor in determining whether children receive the care they need, and also plays a critical role in providing access to maternity care for pregnant women.

The Foundation is particularly supportive of the provisions of your bill that would remove barriers that make it difficult for states to cover pregnant women in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). As you know, women who receive appropriate levels of prenatal care have access to screening and diagnostic tests that can help identify problems early; services to manage developing and existing problems; and education, counseling and referral to help reduce risky behaviors like poor nutrition and substance abuse. Early prenatal care is also associated with improved health outcomes for both mothers and infants, reducing the need for more intensive and costly care. Further, women who have access to timely postpartum care have fewer health complications and are more likely to appropriately space future pregnancies, thereby lowering the risk for preterm birth.

By taking steps to enroll all eligible children in Medicaid and SCHIP, and emphasizing the need to expand eligibility to more children, this legislation has the potential for significantly decreasing the number of uninsured children across the nation. In addition, overturning the burdensome new Medicaid citizenship documentation requirement is a much needed intervention to help stem the decline in enrollment of eligible children in states that have experienced considerable difficulty in trying to implement this ill advised policy. The March of Dimes wholeheartedly supports these efforts to protect and improve coverage for children.

Your bill not only aims to expand coverage, but also to guarantee that coverage is comprehensive and meets the needs of infants and children. In particular the Foundation supports the provision to clarify that the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit is a requirement for all children enrolled in the new Medicaid benchmark benefit packages now allowable under the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA).

Again, the March of Dimes thanks you for your leadership in addressing the health coverage needs of pregnant women, infants and children. Our volunteers and staff look forward to working with you on these shared priorities.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Howse, Ph.D.
President