



Contact: (212) 663-3900

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LANDMARK CHILDREN'S HEALTH BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

On February 4, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) joined President Obama at the White House to sign H.R. 2, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization Act, into law. The House approved the legislation earlier that Wednesday by a vote of 290-135.



Congressman Rangel joins President Barack Obama at the White House SCHIP signing ceremony.

The landmark, bipartisan legislation reauthorizes SCHIP for four years, protecting more than 650,000 low-income New York children already covered by the program while also expanding **it to include an additional 267,000 children** who would otherwise be uninsured.

"What a difference a President makes," said Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles B. Rangel (D-NY). "President Obama and Congress are demonstrating that change has come to Washington, and we are moving forward to improve the quality of life for American families struggling during these hard times. I cannot think of a better investment than the health of our children. Extending the Children's Health Insurance Program is not only good policy; it is the right thing to do."

Enacted in 1997, SCHIP provides health insurance to children whose families have incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private coverage. The renewal, which is paid for through an increase in the Federal tobacco tax, is expected to benefit as many as 11 million children nationwide. The new law also provides states the option of extending coverage to immigrant children who have been in the country legally for less than five years.

For more information on this landmark legislation, visit http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ny15_rangel/schip020409.html

RANGEL STEERS RECOVERY DOLLARS TO NEW YORK

As Congress moved one step closer to jumpstarting the nation's economy out of its current recession, New Yorkers can rest assured that economic relief is on the way thanks to the leadership of Congressman Charles Rangel.

The House of Representatives on January 28 successfully passed the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (HR1)* to provide tax relief to working families and businesses, create jobs and make critical investments in America's future by a vote of 244-188. The move comes less than a week after important provisions of the bill moved through Rangel's Ways and Means Committee by vote of 24-13.

"This package delivers real and practical relief to the hard working families of the city and the hundreds of small business that are the backbone of our economy," said Rangel, Chair of the House's Ways and Means Committee. "Its a package that puts more money in the hands of everyday Americans through tax cuts and extension of unemployment benefits. It provides states and cities with the money for long-needed improvements in our schools and public housing buildings, as well as for the kind of career assistance and job training that we ensure that everyone reaches their full potential, especially our disconnected youth and veterans."

Hearings in Washington and meetings with business, labor and other community leaders in New York and Washington at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 helped to provide important input on provisions that would provide meaningful benefits to families and help businesses create jobs.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Text of H.R. 1
(as approved by the Ways & Means)
<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/110/caltext.pdf>

Summaries of the sections that fall under the jurisdiction of Ways & Means
<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/MoreInfo.asp?section=50>

More information on the plan
<http://www.speaker.gov/newsroom/legislation?id=0273>

WHAT THE RECOVERY PACKAGE MEANS FOR NEW YORK

While the proposal still being debated in the Senate, the House bill would provide immediate and targeted help in the following two areas:

Unemployment Benefits - 1.1 million New Yorkers who are currently out of work will benefit from the \$25 per week increase in unemployment insurance as well as the additional 33 weeks of benefits that the Federal government is looking to provide until December 31, 2009. (That includes almost 175,000 New Yorkers who would have seen their benefits end in April 2009.)

Healthcare- The bill would also provide assistance for workers who have lost their health insurance by providing a temporary 65 percent subsidy for COBRA healthcare premiums, making funding available to states that elect to provide Medicaid coverage to unemployed and uninsured individuals and their families; and extending the qualification for COBRA benefits for older and long term workers until they obtain new employer-sponsored coverage or become eligible for Medicare. (Under current law, eligible workers may continue to receive health coverage through a previous employer's health plan for up to 18 months, but are responsible for 102 percent of the cost of that coverage.)

If passed, New York State and New York City would also receive aid in the following areas to help bridge local budget gaps.

Housing - The New York City Housing Authority will receive over \$520 million for long need repairs such as the elevators that have failed in so many of its buildings.

Education - New York City will get in excess of \$2 billion in funding for special education, Title I programs and for school construction and modernization.

Community Block Grants - The City will receive about \$50 million in additional Community Development Block Grant funds for use in improving its communities.

Transportation - New York State could get as much as \$1.3 billion in surface transportation funds for highways, streets, bridges, bike paths etc. Though cities and counties will get a 20% share of this grant, the lion's share. The metropolitan area of New York City, Northern New Jersey and Westchester will get \$214 million-- \$864 million -- will go to fund transit projects. The state will also receive an additional \$654 million for water and sewer projects.

Hospitals - Hospitals and other health care providers will receive assistance to up grade their computer systems so that all health care providers can better use information technology and provide better health care.



Rangel announces local Recovery Package Benefits with Mayor Michael Bloomberg. (courtesy Office of the Mayor)

"I truly believe that history will record this as one of our bravest moments, when we met the challenge of a sour economy and worked together to build a brighter future." said Rangel. "

RANGEL, LEADERS URGE NEW YORKERS TO FILE FOR EITC

As taxpayers begin to file their taxes, Congressman Charles Rangel joined federal, city and community officials on January 31 in urging New Yorkers to get the most out of their returns by making sure they apply for every eligible tax benefit, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Rangel joined Internal Revenue Service Commissioner Doug Shulman , New York City Department of Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Food Bank Pres. & CEO Dr. Lucy Cabrera and Food Bank Board Chairman Rev. Henry Belin Friday, Jan. to discuss the EITC and the various ways low-wage earners can receive free tax preparation.

"This is not a handout but money that people have earned through their daily labor. Money that can help struggling families through these tough times," said Rangel. Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Congress' major tax-writing committee.

The IRS estimates that about one in four eligible taxpayers fails to claim the EITC, meaning that scores of local residents could be missing out on thousands of dollars in tax refunds. In the Congressman's own 15th Congressional District, as many as 20,000 eligible taxpayers do not, losing out on an average of \$2,000 in benefits.

The news conference on national EITC Awareness Day also highlighted a number of local initiatives to facilitate tax preparation by the IRS and elected officials. These include a Special Saturday Service this year at 172 IRS Taxpayer Assistance Centers (including twelve New York Centers) on three upcoming Saturdays to help prepare EITC returns and an all-day Free Tax Preparation Day on Saturday Jan. 31 co-sponsored by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Rep. Rangel, ARIVA and several local community organizations at the Harlem State Office Building.

EITC claimants are eligible for free tax preparation services provided at nearly 12,000 volunteer sites nationwide (including 54 New York City EITC Coalition sites, 11 of which are run by the Food Bank For New York City). They can also link to Free File through IRS.gov if they wish to prepare their own returns.

For Information about all of these services are available, constituents can call 311 or visit Congressman Rangel's Web site at <http://rangel.house.gov> starting Feb. 10.

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF THE APOLLO THEATER



Congressman Rangel joined thousands of fans worldwide in congratulating the Apollo Theater on kicking off its 75th anniversary season, recognizing the Theater's place in the Harlem community and its impact on American arts and culture.

"Before there was American Idol, there was Amateur Night at the Apollo, which launched the dreams of stardom for many of America's greatest entertainers.

Among them are some of the legends: Ella Fitzgerald, Stevie Wonder, and James Brown.

"Located in the heart of Harlem on 125th Street, the Apollo is the musical soul of our community. For the past 74 years, it has thrilled Americans of every race and religion who have enjoyed unforgettable performances by new and established artists. It's a special place in the entertainment world where many celebrities who started here come home and "look back."

Rangel also thanked Apollo Theater Foundation president & CEO Jonelle Procope and board chairman Richard D. Parsons for their leadership and their efforts in putting together this year's celebration and singled out former Manhattan Borough President and longtime community leader and friend Percy Sutton for his dedication to the famed institution.

"We probably wouldn't be talking about this celebration if it weren't for the hard work of so many, especially Percy Sutton," said Range Angel "His dedication helped savethe Apollo Theater and helped make this day possible."

PUSHING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Congressman Rangel stressed the importance of small grassroots organizations in achieving environmental justice and equity, as he joined a crowd of over 400 people on January 31 for the "Advancing Climate Justice: Transforming the Economy, Public Health and Our Environment" national conference in New York.

"Our community groups are our faceless heroes, much like those who participated in the Civil Rights movement when people said that life was unfair and equality would never come," said Rangel.

"Organizing and education, the election of an African-American president, this has to be just the beginning, not only in terms of justice regarding carbon emissions, but leadership on the fiscal crisis, health care and the environment.

Rangel thanked WE ACT for Environmental Justice for organizing the conference and praised WE ACT Executive Director Peggy Shepard for her longtime dedication and efforts on the issues.

"She has been a strong, sometimes even a lone voice, in this fight [for environmental justice]," said the Congressman. "A leader that has been passionate in educating us on everything from where bus depots should be located to waste removal to the equality of life.

Rangel said that creating a cleaner environment would go along way in securing America's long-term economic future. As the world prepares for the Copenhagen Climate Conference at the end of the year, he said that everyone had an obligation to leave the planet in better shape than they found it. Doing so, however, would be easier with an environmentally friendly White House and Congress. Thankfully, support for green and alternative energy is not just in the economic recovery package currently before Congress, but also in measures to be debated beyond the spring.

"I plan on using the power of the dollar and the Ways and Means Committee to provide incentives for alternative fuels, a carbon tax, and a tax and trade system, said Rangel. "We will determine what the best thing to do with the money raised to do research for alternative fuels."

Rangel said that he hoped that participants would leave the conference passionately inspired on bringing about a greener Washington and world.

"The power of change is not in Washington, DC, but here in your hands," he said. "You need to let people know that change in our environmental practices is not a far fetched theory, and that the loss of life to respiratory disease cannot be accepted as a way of life. "

FIGHTING FOR FAMILIES & IMMIGRATION REFORM

On January 10, 2009, Congressman Rangel joined thousands of New Yorkers for a religious community gathering to bring attention to America's broken immigration system. The event was part of a national series of events that looks to document the testimonies of families being torn apart by raids and other anti-family policies.

Rangel was joined by New York members of Congress, Rep. Jose Serrano and Nydia Velazquez, Illinois Congressman Luis Gutierrez and members from spiritual organizations like Confraternidad de Lideres Conciliares (CONLICO), the Latino Leadership Circle, Latino Pastoral Action Center, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and the New York Council of Churches



Rep. Rangel and religious leaders urge an end to immigration policies that tear families apart. (credit: Ozzie Fernandez)

Rangel applauded the activism of the pastors and said that he supported the groups efforts in trying to get President-elect Obama to champion comprehensive reform legislation during his first year and to end the immigration raids that have targeted immigrant workers and families.

"This is an opportunity to organize religious leaders that do not have as their primary concern getting re-elected or working out a compromise where some people survive and some people are destroyed," said Rangel. "No matter what your religion is, we all know that the most precious thing that we have is life and our children...Let us restore the reputation of America, let the whole world know that we are not in the business of ripping families apart and destroying lives."

PRESIDENT SIGNS FAIR PAY ACT

Congressman Rangel applauded President Barack Obama's swift signing of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act on January 29. The legislation, the first of the new Administration, rectifies a recent Supreme Court decision that has made it harder for workers to pursue pay discrimination claims.

Although the wage gap between men and women has narrowed since the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, gender-based wage discrimination remains a significant problem for women in the U.S. workforce. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women only make 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man. In addition, African American women only earn 66 cents on the dollar while Hispanic women earn 55 cents on the dollar compared to their male counterparts.

For more information on the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, visit <http://edlabor.house.gov/issues/paycheckfairness.shtml>.

LOCAL FREE TAX ASSISTANCE SITES

The following is a list of sites that offer free tax preparation to seniors and families in the 15th Congressional District. Please call ahead, as to some sites have income requirement or may have last minute scheduling changes.

COMMUNITY TAX AID-GODDARD RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CENTER

687 Columbus Avenue | Tel: 212-799-9400

Hours: By Appointment Only, Tuesdays 6 -8:30 p.m. Feb. 10 - April 17. Closed Feb. 17

Language: Spanish

COMMUNITY TAX AID-Union SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATION

237 E. 104th St. | Tel: 212-799-9400

Hours: Saturdays from 10 a.m. - 4 pm

Language: English & Spanish

FOOD CHANGE GODDARD RIVERSIDE

140 W. 140th Street, Bsmt | Tel: (212) 894-8094

Hours: (Feb. & April) Monday-Thursday 12 pm-7 pm ;Saturday 10 am-2 pm

(March) Tues- Thurs. 12 pm - 7 p.m.; Saturday 10 am - 2 p.m.

Languages: English & Spanish

FOODBANK HARLEM FOOD & FINANCIAL CENTER

284 St Nicholas Avenue (btwn 124th & 125th Streets) | Tel: Tel: (212) 894-8094

Hours: (Feb. & April) Monday-Thursday 9 am-7 pm ; Friday-Saturday 9am-5pm

(March) Tues- Thurs. 9 am - 7 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.

Languages: English & Spanish

FOODBANK/NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION

76 Wadsworth Ave. 2nd floor | Tel: (212) 822-8300

Languages: English & Spanish

Hours: (Feb. & April) Monday-Thursday 12 pm-7 pm ;Saturday 9 am-5 pm

(March) Tues- Thurs. 9 am - 7 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.

FREDERICK SAMUEL COMMUNITY CENTER

669 MALCOLM X BLVD (at 144th Street)

Tel: (212) 491-1092

Hours: Saturday from 10:00am - 2:00 pm

Language: English

MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS PUBLIC LIBRARY

2900 BROADWAY (at 113th Street)

Hours: Monday, 12:30 - 4:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10:30am - 2:30pm

Tel: (212) 666-5099

Language: English

SCAN/LA GUARDIA

307 East 116Th Street (between 1st and 2nd Ave)

Tel: (917) 671-1000

Hours: Mon-Thurs. 10 - 4 pm; Friday 10 am - 2 pm

Appointment Preferred

Languages: English & Spanish

2009 Tax Season

Tax Credit Fast Facts

Please contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or New York State Department of Taxation & Finance for more detailed information about eligibility based on your specific situation. Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/ofe to find free and low-cost tax preparation across New York City.

TAX CREDITS

Source: IRS and the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance

What are tax credits?

- Tax credits can reduce the amount of taxes you owe **OR** give you a refund from the government.
- Eligibility for tax credits is usually based on income, number of dependents (including children), age, and employment status.

What are some important tax credits for which I might be eligible?

- The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Child Tax Credit, and tax credits for child and dependent care can all provide significant benefits to families and individuals who qualify.

What is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)?

- The EITC is a federal, state, and New York City tax credit for qualifying families, noncustodial parents, or individuals who work full or part-time or are self-employed.
- Working families who earned less than \$42,000 last year may be eligible for up to \$6,500.
- Working individuals aged 25 through 64 who earned less than \$16,000 last year may be eligible for up to \$600.
- Eligible filers must have investment income less than \$2,950.
- Eligible filers must have a Social Security Number (SSN).

What is the Child Tax Credit?

- The Child Tax Credit is a federal tax credit worth up to \$1,000 for each qualifying dependent under age 17 claimed on the parent's or guardian's tax return.
- Eligible filers can have either a SSN or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to qualify.

What are tax credits for child and dependent care?

- The Federal Child and Dependent Care Credit, New York's Empire State Child Credit, and the New York City Child Care Tax Credit can assist families with lower incomes or who are underemployed with the cost of child care.
- The federal and state credits require that qualifying dependents are up to (but not including) age 13. There are no income restrictions.
- The New York City Child Care Tax Credit requires that qualifying dependents are up to (but not including) age 4. Eligible filers must earn less than \$30,000.
- The child or children must have lived with the tax filer for more than six (6) months.
- Eligible filers can have either a SSN or an ITIN to qualify.
- Eligible filers will need to verify the child care provider's taxpayer identification number or SSN.

How do I get these credits?

- You must file your federal and New York State tax returns.
- You can file for these tax credits for up to three years back if you didn't claim them previously.
- In some cases, you don't have to owe income tax to get the credits.
- Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/ofe to find free and low-cost tax preparation throughout NYC!

How will these credits affect my other public benefits?

- In most cases, claiming tax credits does not affect eligibility for benefits like the Food Stamp Program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or subsidized housing. These credits are not considered income when determining eligibility for these programs, but they may be counted as a resource for some programs after a certain time frame.

[More...](#)

CLAIMING THE CREDITS

Here are some important tips to remember as you prepare for the tax season.

1. You may qualify for free or low-cost tax preparation.

- Partners in the Mayor's NYC EITC Coalition run free Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and low-cost Tax Prep Plus sites Citywide to help you claim the credits for which you qualify.
- **FREE** VITA sites will prepare tax returns for families (with dependents) earning less than \$45,000 or individuals earning less than \$20,000. Select VITA sites will offer SaveNYC Accounts to help filers use part of their refund to build savings. Visit nyc.gov/ofe for more information.
- Tax Prep Plus sites charge only **\$20** for a return prepared by a Tax One professional. Sites are hosted by community-based partners. Families (with dependents) earning less than \$55,000 and individuals earning less than \$30,000 qualify for Tax Prep Plus tax preparation.

2. As a tax filer, you have important rights in New York City.

- You can receive a copy of every tax return prepared for you.
- A notice of a tax preparer's qualifications must be posted in the office, and the preparer must maintain records showing his/her qualifications are real, including whether the preparer is an accountant or an attorney.
- You must be given a receipt that states any charges for preparing the return, and the receipt must list the address and phone number where the tax preparer can be contacted during the year.

3. If your taxes are filed electronically, you should receive a refund check from the IRS in 8 to 14 business days.

4. A Refund Anticipation Loan (RAL) is not a tax refund, but is actually a high-interest loan borrowed against your anticipated tax refund. You will pay interest, and could owe a lot if you do not qualify for the refund you expected!

5. You must bring some key documents with you when you go to file your taxes:

- Proof of identity (such as a driver's license or other photo ID)
- Social Security card or ITIN letter for all individuals listed on the return including dependents
- Copies of ALL W-2, 1098 and 1099 forms
- Amounts of any other income
- Child care provider's taxpayer identification number or SSN
- Amounts/dates of estimated or other tax payments made
- Bank documents showing routing and account numbers if requesting direct deposit into a checking or savings account

6. If you are thinking about spending part of your refund on a used car, furniture, or other items, visit nyc.gov/consumers for smart shopping tips.

7. Think about using part of your refund to pay down debt or build savings. Visit nyc.gov/ofe for a list of ideas to make the most of your tax refund, and to find free and low-cost financial education classes and counseling throughout NYC.



Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Department of Consumer Affairs
Office of Financial Empowerment

Jonathan Mintz
Commissioner

Center for
Economic Opportunity

Veronica M. White
Executive Director