

Murphy Calls on President to Support Improved Access to Healthcare for Kids

Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) held a press conference at The Hospital of Central Connecticut at New Britain General to call on the President to support an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) program, more commonly referred to as HUSKY B in the State of Connecticut.

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NEW BRITAIN – Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) held a press conference at The Hospital of Central Connecticut at New Britain General to call on the President to support an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) program, more commonly referred to as HUSKY B in the State of Connecticut. Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate passed legislation that could give an additional 5 million children nationwide, including 38,000 in Connecticut, access to healthcare. Despite bipartisan support for the program, President Bush is threatening to veto the legislation.

"Providing healthcare for our nation's children should be a nonpartisan issue. At the Republican National Convention in 2004, the President himself said that 'In a new term, we will lead an aggressive effort to enroll millions of poor children who are eligible but not signed up for government health insurance programs.' I hope that wasn't just an empty campaign promise – the legislation we have drafted does just what the President said he wanted to do. Now is his chance to sign a law that will make sure that 5 million additional children are not left without the care they need," said Murphy.

The existing SCHIP program has proven to be successful – it has cut the number of uninsured children by one-third nationwide in the last decade. HUSKY B currently covers more than 23,000 kids in Connecticut.

Murphy was joined today by The Hospital of Central Connecticut President Laurence A. Tanner and Hospital Chief of Pediatrics Antoinetta Capriglione M.D.

"Providing health insurance coverage to children is critically important," said Laurence A. Tanner, president and chief executive officer of The Hospital of Central Connecticut. "Such coverage helps kids get the routine and preventive care they need and deserve, before small problems escalate into large ones. Expansion of the SCHIP program will also remove a barrier to countless parents who are seeking care for their children but are concerned about how they will pay for that care."

On August 1, the House of Representatives approved with a bipartisan majority the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act, which reauthorizes SCHIP and protects coverage for 6 million children, including more than 23,000 in Connecticut. The CHAMP Act also extends healthcare coverage to 5 million more low-income children, covering a total of 11 million children.

Support for SCHIP has always come from both political parties since it was established on a bipartisan basis in 1997 by President Clinton and Congress. In a letter issued by the National Governors Association in July, governors from both parties called for urgent action to reauthorize it. The program must be reauthorized by September 30, 2007; if the President does not sign it into law before then, 6 million children nationwide could lose their healthcare.

Insuring children is affordable and cost-effective for taxpayers. It costs less than \$3.50 a day – about the cost of a Starbucks Frappuccino – to cover a child through SCHIP. Furthermore, insuring kids is cost-effective for taxpayers who pick up the tab for indigent care through emergency rooms – the most expensive way to care for a child's health – as well as because a healthy child is more likely to succeed in education and life.

The majority of uninsured children are currently eligible for coverage through SCHIP or Medicaid – but better outreach and adequate funding are needed to identify and enroll them. This bill gives states the tools and incentives necessary to

reach millions of uninsured children who are eligible for, but not enrolled in, the program.

"The CHAMP Act may be the most comprehensive piece of public health improvement legislation Congress has seen in a decade. I will work tirelessly to make sure that this bill is signed into law," said Murphy.
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