

SCHIP Must be Renewed and Expanded! – by Anne Gargano

As many have been following in the news, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was up for renewal in September, ten years after its creation. SCHIP is the program that funds All Kids (formerly KidCare) and FamilyCare here in Illinois. These programs provide health coverage for low-income children whose families cannot afford or obtain private health insurance, but have household incomes above the Medicaid eligibility guideline. Since its inception a decade ago, SCHIP has proven to be one of the greatest social policy successes of recent generations and managed to decrease the number of uninsured children in this country by one third. In order to continue to provide coverage to these working families, as well as all eligible but unenrolled children, SCHIP must be reauthorized with 35 billion dollars of extra funding.

The extra funding for SCHIP is needed for two reasons: a) to provide outreach to, and coverage for all children who are currently eligible but not enrolled in SCHIP; and b) to keep up with the rising costs of health insurance in the United States. Anything less than the \$35 billion requested would result in a cut in the program because coverage for children would have to be cut. The \$35 billion additional funding request represents a significant compromise, a barebones compromise, compared to the original request of more than \$60 billion extra funding.

Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) and the members of this community have been working tirelessly in support of the reauthorization and expansion of this important program. CCHCC held a press conference in July calling on Rep. Timothy Johnson to vote in favor of the SCHIP legislation and CCHCC's own Paulette Coleman spoke about how SCHIP has benefited her family. She said, "I work very hard to support my five children and my grandbaby and I cannot afford private health insurance for them. If Congress doesn't figure out how to keep funding this program, I don't know what we will do. And it's not just me, families all over the country are gonna be suffering."

Although the legislation to reauthorize and expand SCHIP passed in both the House and the Senate, President Bush vetoed it on ideological grounds. Congress then had to vote to override the President's veto, but the House lacked a two-thirds veto-proof majority. CCHCC is extremely disappointed to say that every time he had the opportunity to vote on this issue, our Representative, Timothy Johnson, voted against SCHIP. Despite an overwhelming number of phone calls from members of our community, as well as being presented with over 1,000 signatures in favor of SCHIP, Rep. Johnson has repeatedly voted against this important legislation. CCHCC Executive Director, Claudia Lennhoff commented on Rep. Johnson's actions saying, "Rep. Tim Johnson has willfully and knowingly failed his constituents on his SCHIP votes. He has been contacted repeatedly by thousands of local constituents who told him to vote yes to SCHIP. CCHCC spoke to over 1,000 of our members by phone and they asked that we add their names to a letter to be delivered to Rep. Johnson calling on him to vote yes for SCHIP. Rep. Tim Johnson knows that his constituents, like the rest of America, overwhelmingly support SCHIP and want him to do the same."

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CCHCC participates in a press conference in support of SCHIP renewal.