

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C., Feb. 4, 2009 – The National Health Law Program (NHeLP) applauds today's signing of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Act of 2009, which will significantly improve and extend health coverage to millions of children in the United States. At a time when more and more wage earners are losing their jobs and their employer health coverage, the CHIP Act will cover 4 million new children and continue critical health coverage for over 7 million more. This administration's commitment to health care reform truly is a sign of good things to come.

CHIP will allow many otherwise struggling families to take their sick child to the doctor, their child with a chronic health condition like diabetes or asthma to treatment, and allow a pregnant woman to get the necessary prenatal care to provide for the health of herself and her new baby.

"The renewal of the CHIP program is important not just for what it will do for the health of our children, but also for the promise it suggests as we move forward on much needed health reform," said Emily Spitzer, Executive Director of NHeLP. "I am hopeful this piece of legislation reflects not just a new atmosphere in Washington, but a new day in dealing with the serious problems of our current health care system."

The Act employs a number of critical approaches that will significantly improve health for our nation's low-income families, including:

- Allowing states the flexibility to provide coverage to children and pregnant women up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level;
- Increasing the percentage of the costs of the program that the federal government will pay;
- Reinstating the ability for states to provide care to legal immigrant children and pregnant women who have been in this country for less than five years;
- Increasing the quality of health care provided to children and their families by helping them communicate in their own languages with state agencies and clinicians;

- Allowing the states the option to provide dental benefits through CHIP to children whose private insurance does not cover dental care; and
- Providing \$100 million for grants to states and community-based organizations to do outreach and enrollment to assist in the effort to cover every eligible child.

While the passage of this legislation is a clear step forward on many fronts, NHeLP is disappointed that it imposes a new documentation burden on persons seeking CHIP – allowing states to require children to document their U.S. citizenship. This requirement will work at cross purposes with other provisions of the law designed to ease the enrollment process. In the Medicaid program, where the requirement is already in effect, it has prevented thousands and thousands of eligible citizens from receiving the health care they need.

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