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Johnson to Introduce “Covering Kids Act”

Enrolls Low-Income Children in Safety-Net Health Programs

Would Benefit More than 43,000 Uninsured Connecticut Children

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Nancy Johnson today announced she will introduce legislation to help ensure children eligible for safety-net health insurance like Connecticut’s HUSKY plan receive the care they deserve.

“Every child in America deserves high quality health care,” Johnson said. “Connecticut’s HUSKY plan and others have successfully insured millions of children, yet many families eligible for these critical programs do not take advantage of them. This important bill will help ensure that children eligible for these programs get the health care they need and deserve.”

Johnson wrote and passed legislation in 1997 that led to the creation of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), known as the HUSKY plan in Connecticut. It has successfully provided health care to millions of low-income, uninsured children across the country, including 5.8 million in 2003 alone.

Still, five million children eligible for SCHIP and Medicaid are not enrolled in either of these safety net health insurance programs today. In Connecticut, more than 43,000 children are eligible for the HUSKY plan but are not enrolled, according to U.S. Census figures. Studies show that families of these children are not aware that these programs are available to them or face other barriers to enrollment.

Johnson will introduce this week the House companion to legislation introduced yesterday by U.S. Sens. Bill Frist (R-TN) and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), the “Covering Kids Act of 2005.”

The bill authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to provide grants to states, schools, community and non-profit groups that conduct creative outreach and enrollment activities. These grants will also be used to educate families on the importance of health insurance and quality care for pregnant women and children.

The bill provides \$50 million to HHS in each of the next two years for outreach and enrollment grants. The HHS Secretary will target the grants to areas with high numbers of

children who are eligible for SCHIP and Medicaid but are not enrolled.

"It's a phenomenal bill," said Ellen Andrews, Executive Director of the Connecticut Health Policy Project, a non-profit advocacy organization working on the uninsured issue.

"Outreach has been a challenge. There are many misconceptions out there and families need to learn about these programs from people they trust. It's remarkable the successes some community groups have had in enrolling eligible families."

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