

WASHINGTON, DC – All eight Democratic members of Maryland's Congressional Delegation today gathered in the U.S. Capitol for a press conference to discuss the importance of ensuring a guaranteed dental benefit for children as the Congress works to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and to call on the President to reconsider his threat to veto this critical children's healthcare legislation.

The dental guarantee is included in the version of the bill passed Wednesday by the House - the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act "CHAMP" ACT (HR 3162). The Senate passed its version of CHIP (S. 1893) Thursday evening, which includes \$200 million for "Dental Health Grants." Under current law, dental care is not mandated for children covered under the CHIP.

Given the tragic dental-related death of Deamonte Driver in Prince George's County, Maryland, the delegation has worked on behalf of a comprehensive dental benefit. Members were joined by representatives from dental organizations that have been instrumental in the push to include the guaranteed benefit.

"Deamonte Driver's story is a tragedy that could potentially be played out at any time in any city throughout the country – which is why the People's House voted to extend CHIP coverage to 11 million children, five million of which are eligible but not currently enrolled," stated Congressman Hoyer. "Eleven million children are counting on our President to sign the CHIP reauthorization before the program expires on September 30. When this legislation reaches the President's desk, I hope he will reconsider his veto threats and make the right decision."

"I am particularly pleased that the bill provides grants to states to improve dental coverage for children," said Senator Cardin. "The tragic death of Deamonte Driver highlighted the need to provide children with access to dental care. This bill will help do that."

"Earlier this year Deamonte Driver died because he didn't have access to dental care. His preventable tooth infection spread to his brain. This should never happen in this country," said Senator Mikulski. "I will continue to fight for children like Deamonte and for the health of children everywhere."

"For those of us from Maryland, the CHAMP Act has a face and a name, but there are millions

of Deamonte Drivers out there who are counting on us to get this right,” Congressman Elijah E. Cummings said. “We cannot afford to play politics with children’s lives.”

“As a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, I am proud that we were able to secure a Federal mandate for dental services for 11 million children,” said Congressman Albert Wynn. “However, we need to also realize that making outreach efforts is critical. This is particularly important in underserved communities; a guaranteed dental benefit does not guarantee dental care.”

“I am pleased the House CHAMP Act provides for guaranteed dental coverage in SCHIP,” said Congressman Van Hollen. “Good oral health care is essential to the health of children. No child should have to suffer because they don’t have access to adequate dental care.”

“If we don't stand up for children, who will?” stated Congressman C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger. “The State Children’s Health Insurance Program ensures that more Maryland children will get access to the care they need to grow and thrive.”

“Deamonte Driver’s death was tragic but his legacy doesn’t have to be,” said Congressman John Sarbanes. “It would be shameful for the President to veto a bill that would help millions of American children access basic healthcare.”

“S-CHIP is the single most important federal healthcare priority we have as a State,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “I want to thank the Maryland Congressional Delegation for fighting for a comprehensive health care bill that will ensure that thousands of Maryland’s children continue to benefit from this important program and thousands more who are eligible can receive the medical care they need.”

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