

Washington, DC – U.S. Representatives Steny H. Hoyer, Elijah E. Cummings, and Albert R. Wynn released the following statements on the newly unveiled Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act "CHAMP" ACT (HR 3162) to reauthorize the successful State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and protect Medicare for America's seniors. The program currently covers 105,000 children in the State of Maryland.

Since it was enacted in 1997, the State Children's Health Insurance Program has enabled millions of uninsured children across the nation to receive the medical care they need. Despite its success, the program currently lacks the resources to fulfill its goal, leaving more than 6 million eligible children nationwide uninsured. In the State of Maryland, we have 60,000 children who qualify for the program but are not currently enrolled. This is 60,000 too many.

Not long ago, we were reminded of the devastating and sometimes deadly consequences that can result from children being denied basic health services in learning of the tragic yet preventable death of 12-year old Deamonte Driver from Prince George's County. Forty dollars' worth of dental care could have saved his life, but Deamonte was poor and homeless and he did not have access to a dentist.

Majority Leader Hoyer said: "The grim reality is that for many low-income families like Deamonte's, children's dental care is out of reach. Coverage under SCHIP varies from state to state, and even in states that provide dental services, such as in Maryland, too few dentists participate. This tragedy right in our own community underscores why it is so critical for us to take immediate action to address the healthcare needs of our children, including dental.

"The House CHAMP Act, which reauthorizes SCHIP, would address this gaping hole in children's health coverage with a dental guarantee that includes preventative care and parental education about the need for regular screenings. Furthermore, our bill seeks to ensure that kids aren't being left out of a program specifically designed for them by enrolling approximately five of the six million children who are eligible but aren't yet signed up.

"The CHAMP Act is one of the most significant pieces of legislation that Congress has considered in the last decade. We have a duty to ensure that all of our children receive the medical attention they need, and dental care is no exception. That is why we have worked together, along with other members of the Maryland delegation, to ensure the inclusion of a comprehensive dental benefit under the SCHIP. As the House moves forward in considering this legislation, we will continue to focus on this critical provision to ensure it is included in the

final bill.”

Congressman Cummings said: “Deamonte’s case was rare and extreme, but he was by no means alone in his suffering. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that dental disease is the single most common chronic childhood disease in the country. We would not accept such gross negligence in our distribution of preventable diseases like Tuberculosis or Smallpox, and we must not accept it for dental disease, either.

“For this reason, it is essential that we include a mandatory benefit in the upcoming reauthorization of SCHIP. Access to quality health care is not a privilege; it is a right. No child should be refused that right. Deamonte’s death was tragic, and the Maryland delegation will continue to fight to ensure that it was not in vain.”

Congressman Wynn said: “As a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, which is currently marking up this piece of legislation, I am pleased to have worked with the Committee to ensure that dental care is included in the reauthorization of SCHIP. I am proud to join in the effort to guarantee dental care for all of our children, and have worked to include provisions in the bill requiring an evaluation of impact of SCHIP dental benefits and establishing dental performance benchmarks. I am also proud to have worked with members of the Maryland Delegation to incorporate their initiatives into the underlying bill before it comes out of Committee.

“The tragic death of Deamonte Driver from untreated tooth decay was inexcusable and preventable, and highlighted the urgency for the provision of dental benefits in Federal health care programs. All children deserve dental coverage and the opportunity to lead healthy lives.

”I am proud to support the reauthorization of SCHIP. Providing necessary health care to children, our most vulnerable citizens, reflects what Democrats stand for.”

The CHAMP bill is being marked up today in the Energy and Commerce and the Ways and Means Committees. The text of the legislation and a summary can be found on the Energy and Commerce committee website at <http://energycommerce.house.gov>

Earlier this year, Members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation sent letters urging both the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Senate Finance Committee to guarantee a SCHIP dental health benefit. Reps. Cummings and Wynn have both introduced bills to improve access to children's dental healthcare.

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