

ANNAPOLIS, MD – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) joined Governor Martin O'Malley, Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown, Maryland House Speaker Michael E. Busch, children's health advocates, and families today in urging support for the reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The bill that Congress will soon send to President Bush would reauthorize and extend the CHIP to cover more than ten million children nationwide from working families who do not qualify for Medicaid but can not afford private health insurance. The bill has passed both chambers of Congress with significant bipartisan majorities and has a veto proof margin in the Senate. Every member of the Maryland Congressional Delegation voted in support of the measure, except Congressman Roscoe Bartlett of the 6th District. Despite its broad support, President Bush has said he will veto the legislation.

"President Bush made a campaign promise to 'lead an aggressive effort to enroll millions of poor children who are eligible but not signed up for the government's health insurance programs,'" stated Congressman Steny Hoyer, referencing a speech the President made at the 2004 Republican National Convention. "The bill we are about to send to him does just that. The question before the President today really comes down to this: Will you stand with American children who through no fault of their own are uninsured, or will you go back on your own campaign promise and deny them the health care they need?"

"Maryland is the wealthiest state in the country, with the best healthcare delivery system in the country, yet we continue to see the number of uninsured grow each year," said Speaker Busch. "Healthcare is not a luxury or a privilege for those who can afford to pay. It is a basic right for all of our citizens. Congress has done its job and now it is time for President Bush to do his."

Maryland currently has 137,000 uninsured children and 639,000 uninsured adults. During the 2007 legislative session, the Maryland House of Delegates passed legislation that would have provided healthcare access to every uninsured child in the State as well as nearly 50,000 uninsured adults. Governor O'Malley has announced plans to expand Maryland's healthcare coverage during the upcoming legislative session.

"Maryland, like so many other states in our nation, faces a crisis in children's health care. In our country, over 47 million Americans lack health insurance, and in Maryland there are over 130,000 children living without health care," said Governor O'Malley. "Certainly, the richest state in the richest nation in the world can do better. SCHIP has proven to be one of our most

effective state-federal partnerships, and I want to thank our entire federal delegation and commend the Frost family for fighting so hard to expand this critical piece of legislation."

Also at the press conference was the Frost family, a Baltimore family of six that has been advocating for the CHIP reauthorization. Three years ago, Bonnie Frost and three of her children were in a serious car accident, which sent Graeme, age 12, and his sister Gemma, age 9, to the hospital. Graeme was in a coma for a week and remained in the hospital for more than five months. Graeme delivered the Democratic Radio address on Saturday asking the President to sign the bill, and today, read from a letter that he is sending to President Bush asking for a meeting.

"My parents work really hard and always make sure my sister and I have everything we need," said Graeme Frost on Saturday. "I don't know why President Bush wants to stop kids who really need help from getting CHIP."

Maryland's Congressional Delegation has been working hard over the past several months to ensure that the additional CHIP funds are included to enroll more children. Currently, more than 100,000 children in Maryland participate in the CHIP program. The increased funding would provide an additional 42,000 children who qualify for coverage but are not yet enrolled.

The legislation will also provide, for the first time, a guaranteed dental benefit - a benefit championed by the Maryland Delegation after the tragic death of twelve-year old Prince George's County resident Deamonte Driver who died after a tooth infection spread to his brain. In addition, the reauthorization would overturn a proposed rule by the Bush administration that would eliminate 4,000 Maryland families with incomes above \$41,300 per year for a families of four.

"The Maryland delegation stands united in our support for insuring ten million kids under this bill, with the exception of Congressman Roscoe Bartlett," stated Congressman Hoyer. "In the end, we hope that he will support this legislation, and we hope to sustain the support we have from Congressman Gilchrest and others if it comes down to an override vote."

"The Maryland Health Care For All! Coalition demands that President George Bush and Rep. Roscoe Bartlett explain in person to Graeme Frost why they oppose health care for children,"

said Vincent DeMarco, President of Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative. "Thanks to the leadership of Speaker Mike Busch, we in Maryland have one of the best children's health care programs in the country. We will work with our federal and state leaders to protect this program for kids and make sure that all Marylanders have access to quality, affordable health care."

"President Bush's threatened veto would only serve to steal health insurance coverage from our children," said Lt. Governor Brown. "Governor O'Malley and I are fighting to cover 800,000 Marylanders without insurance already. If President Bush does not reauthorize the CHIP program, this number will grow exponentially."

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