

**By Morgan Doss, Taylor Lankford, Madison Ball and Katlyn Estep  
Harlan Independent Middle School, Harlan KY**

Fellow Kentuckians, we have a serious issue at hand that needs to be dealt with now. The problem of uninsured children in Kentucky is a persistent problem.

When children do not have health insurance, they can't get the medical care they need. They can't go to the dentist. They can't get medicine.

Luckily some children in Kentucky have access to a great health program called KCHIP. KCHIP stands for Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program and it provides health insurance coverage for children from working families. When children get signed up for KCHIP they can go to the doctor when they are sick, get medicines to make them feel better, get their immunizations on time, and generally be more healthy. We all know when children are healthy they are better students and have a better life. As students ourselves, we know how difficult it can be to catch up at school after too many absences. Poor health negatively impacts every aspect of a child's life. In addition to health-related consequences, untreated or insufficiently treated health concerns can result in a chain reaction of harmful outcomes.

Unfortunately, not every child who is eligible to sign up for KCHIP actually does. In fact, enrollment in KCHIP declined in 39 counties, including Harlan County, where I'm from, which had the largest decrease.

There are many barriers for families to enroll in KCHIP – one of the main ones is that they have to take time off work to go to the state office to sign up. This creates a problem, because parents have to work. With smaller children,

parents would have a harder time leaving home to sign up. Since there's no public transportation in many rural areas of the state, people may not have many options to get there.

To eliminate the face-to-face interview requirement for enrollment we need to create an online application so families can sign up anywhere – the library, the family resource center, or at home.

Another idea is to let families receive KCHIP for a full year. This would give children a chance to get healthy, get to know their doctors, and have continual coverage. The most important thing is that kids have health coverage. Wouldn't everyone in Kentucky agree with that?

We also need to continue to reach out to families so they know that KCHIP exists and exactly what benefits they are eligible to receive.

We don't need to let kids in Kentucky get too sick before they get treated. This is not only bad for them, but costs the state more money. Considering the high cost of emergency rooms, prevention through regular medical care is not only better for individual children's health, but also for the economic well-being of the state as a whole. By making adjustments to help families enroll their children in KCHIP and ensure they remain covered, Kentuckians will be more likely to be insured and get the medical attention they need when they're sick.

Thank you for your time.