



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY
YOUTH
ADVOCATES

For Immediate Release

October 3, 2007

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THE SCHIP FIASCO: LOTS OF CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

Louisville, KY – Today, President Bush fulfilled his promise of vetoing the bill to reauthorize SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program). The bill, passed last week by the House and the Senate, would provide an additional \$35 billion in federal funding over the next 5 years for SCHIP and healthcare insurance to an additional 4 million children from low-income working families in the United States. President Bush's proposal for reauthorization included only \$5 billion in additional funding for SCHIP which is inadequate to maintain current caseloads.

This veto will negatively impact thousands of Kentucky's children. Kentucky's SCHIP plan, KCHIP (Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program), provides health insurance coverage to approximately 52,000 children. These are the children of working families whose parents cannot afford a private healthcare insurance plan.

The President's veto creates a bleak outlook for Kentucky's children. Without adequate funding, the veto puts the healthcare of children that currently depend on KCHIP at risk – and it slams the door shut on the healthcare needs of the estimated 50,000 children that are eligible for the program but remain uninsured in Kentucky. Makeda Harris, health policy analyst at Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), observed, "When I have talked with Kentucky's SCHIP families, none of them ever expressed a desire to enroll their kids in KCHIP versus a private insurer. KCHIP is simply the only alternative for many working families."

While every member of Kentucky's Congressional delegation has voiced support for SCHIP, only Congressmen John Yarmuth and Ben Chandler voted in favor of the SCHIP compromise bill. Primary opposition to the bill among the Kentucky delegation hinged on the funding mechanism, an increase in the federal tobacco excise tax of \$0.61 per pack. "The welfare of Kentucky's tobacco interests cannot take precedent over the health of Kentucky's most vulnerable children," asserts Harris.

Terry Brooks, KYA's Executive Director, observes, "It is always a tragedy when political posturing trumps the needs of children. We as a country face many issues, such as the war on terror or social security reform in which well-intentioned citizens can have honest disagreements over policy direction. However, I cannot fathom how this nation's political leaders failed in the art of compromise on this issue."

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***Kentucky Youth Advocates** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*