



December 30, 2008

Voices for America's Children
Attn: Dr. George Askew, Deputy CEO
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Dr. Askew,

We want to congratulate you on your appointment to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Review Team for the Obama-Biden Transition. We are hopeful that given your recent visit to Idaho and your position on the transition team, you may be able to assist us in providing input to the new administration on children's health issues.

As you know from your visit, Idaho is one of the harshest political climates in which to make progress for children.

- Idaho is one of only 3 states where the SCHIP eligibility level remains below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- More than half of the 47,000 uninsured children in Idaho are currently eligible for publicly funded programs but don't know about them because of legislative restrictions on outreach.
- The percentage of Idaho's young children living in mid-income families (100 – 200% FPL) is greater than any other state.
- The number of uninsured Idaho children under age 5 rose sharply from 9.3% in 2006 to 12.4% in 2007.

We are very supportive of the recent letter from Voices for America's Children to President-elect Obama which encourages Congress to act quickly to reauthorize and expand SCHIP. We agree that SCHIP reauthorization must incorporate provisions that enable and encourage states to cover immigrant children, streamline and simplify their eligibility systems, and expand activities to provide comprehensive, developmental services based upon a child health model.

We are concerned, however, that even if the above initiative passes, Idaho will once again be left out. We would like to suggest that it would be very helpful to us if a floor of 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) was established for the SCHIP program. This was the intended floor when SCHIP was passed in 1997. It was left optional for states to incrementally meet this challenge. As of this writing, only three states including Idaho have not increased financial eligibility for children to 200% FPL. The other states are Oregon and North Dakota. While a floor at 200% FPL will not be onerous to most states at this time it would be particularly helpful to advocates in the remaining three states. In addition, in the current economy, there may be efforts by other state legislatures to reduce eligibility. Mandating that every state provide SCHIP to 200% FPL would clearly establish a national threshold for children's coverage and prevent individual states from arbitrarily reducing coverage during economic downturns when more children are probably in need of assistance.

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IVC is *the* statewide organization advocating for public policies that improve the lives of children in Idaho

We would also like to emphasize that simplification, outreach and collaboration with community partners needs to be clearly mandated in the legislation. It has been our experience that language that encourages these activities does not result in strong outcomes in extremely conservative settings.

Thank you for any assistance you can provide in bringing these suggestions for strengthening the SCHIP reauthorization language to the attention of the new administration.

Our best to you in the New Year.

Warm Regards,

Hollis Brookover
President

Cc: Bill Bentley, President & CEO
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