

## **SCHIP and KidCare/Healthy Kids**

SCHIP, the state-administered federal health care program for uninsured, low income children is up for renewal this year. In Florida, it is called Healthy Kids and is under the umbrella program called KidCare.

SCHIP is very successful in getting preventive and primary care to children who are uninsured, with strikingly positive results: e.g. children with asthma and no insurance have 60% fewer attacks and 70% fewer hospitalizations once they are covered by SCHIP.

SCHIP saves lives. It also keeps kids out of emergency rooms, since they can visit their own primary care providers and prevent emergencies. So SCHIP saves money for all of us.

But there are still millions of American children and 750,000 Florida children who have no health insurance, mostly because their parents cannot afford it. The cost of health care in America far exceeds that of any other developed country, and the cost of health insurance is beyond the reach of 47 million Americans as a result.

Both houses of Congress have passed bills to expand SCHIP so that more children will be eligible. The proposed laws would pay for this expansion by increasing the tax on tobacco products--which is also a good idea, since the most effective way to deter children and teens from taking up the habit is to increase the price of tobacco.

Needless to say, some folks (insurance companies and tobacco lobbyists, for example) oppose any expansion in SCHIP, calling it "socialized medicine" (like Medicare or Medicaid?), and fear that SCHIP would "crowd out" insurance companies by encouraging families to drop their current health insurance to take up SCHIP. There is little evidence that SCHIP "crowds out" private insurance at present. And there are literally millions of uninsured children whose parents cannot afford health insurance.

Senator Nelson voted for the Senate bill. Representative Boyd voted for the House bill. Senator Martinez voted against the Senate bill. President Bush has promised to veto either bill when it comes to his desk.

The justice issue is clear. Expanding SCHIP is a moral obligation of a society that values children's health and lives over the profits of insurance and tobacco companies.

If you agree with this point of view, you are encouraged to write to your congressional representatives and to the president asking them to support the expansion of SCHIP/KidCare.

Tallahassee Equality Action Ministry is offering for your use a sample letter that you may photocopy, personalize and send to your elected officials. You can add a hand written line at the bottom of this letter, and send it. Or you can write your own letter and may use the information in this article. Be sure to include your full name and address in your letter.

Let's get life saving health care to more children.

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