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Supporters Say More Access to Children’s Health Insurance Makes Sense for Families, Health Providers

Press Conference at State Capitol Urges Passage of “All Kids Act”

OKLAHOMA CITY – (April 3, 2007) – A coalition of children’s advocates, health care professionals and elected officials gathered at the State Capitol today to urge passage of the “All Kids Act,” a bill that would expand eligibility for publicly subsidized health insurance to children of moderate-income households.

“Providing health insurance coverage for Oklahoma’s children makes sense: for the health of children, for the pocket books of Oklahoma’s working families, and for the health care industry,” said Anne Roberts, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

“Today at least 130,000 children in this state are without health insurance, leaving them and their families exposed to grave medical and financial risks,” said State Senator Tom Adelson, the bill’s primary author and co-chair of the Senate Health Appropriations Subcommittee. “The All-Kids Act allows us to build on existing programs to offer affordable coverage to ‘gap families’ – those who make too much to be eligible for Medicaid but who may not be offered or be able to afford family coverage through their employer.”

The bill, which passed the Senate last month and is also known as SB 424, would make a state-administered health care benefit, or a subsidy toward the cost of privately sponsored health insurance, available to children whose family incomes are between 185 percent and 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (\$37,000 to \$60,000 for a family of four). Unlike Medicaid, which charges no premiums and has only token cost-sharing, the families of children enrolled in the state-administered health benefit program would contribute to the cost of care on a sliding-scale based on family income. The bill is awaiting consideration by the House.

“SB 424 offers a truly cost-effective approach to ensure that more children have access to the vital health care services they need to stay healthy and thrive,” said Rep. Doug Cox, the bill’s House co-author and a practicing physician. “When you have a chance to access \$3.48 in federal matching dollars for every \$1 of state funds, it is almost irresponsible not to make that investment.”

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The press conference coincided with the release of a new issue brief on expanding health insurance coverage from Community Action Project, a Tulsa-based anti-poverty agency. "Expanding access to health insurance for Oklahoma's children would have significant, far-reaching impacts that benefit all Oklahomans," stated Cindy Decker, Ph.D., the report's author. The issue brief cites research showing that children with health insurance are more likely to receive early, preventive health care, less likely to visit emergency rooms or be hospitalized, less likely to be absent from school, and more likely to perform better academically.

"The future of our state rests with our children, and our children are in jeopardy. We must take all necessary steps to ensure that our kids have every opportunity to become productive, independent citizens. And one of the first steps must be to provide for their good health through access to the right care at the right time. Far too many children go without the medical services they need because their parents do not have access to affordable health insurance. This measure represents a giant leap forward for Oklahoma and for All Kids," said Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland.

Dr. Roger Sheldon, a neonatologist with Oklahoma University Medical Center and a Board member of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, stressed the importance of good health for a child's overall development. "When children don't have insurance, they tend not to get the basic preventive care that allows for early detection and timely treatment of problems," she said. "Addressing this problem can move us towards being a healthier, more prosperous state."

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