



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

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April 26, 2007

The Honorable Richard Lugar  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Lugar and Bingaman:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Children's Express Lane to Improve Health Coverage and Program Integrity Act, legislation that improves states' ability to identify and enroll qualified uninsured children into Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) by allowing for streamlined enrollment processes. Specifically, this bill would give states the option to expedite enrollment of eligible children by:

- Granting income-eligibility for Medicaid or SCHIP when another public program has already found that the family has an income low enough to qualify for health coverage -- whether or not the other program uses a different income-finding methodology;
- Providing federal resources to develop the hardware and software needed to facilitate the exchange of electronic data among federal programs;
- Allowing states to access publicly-held data to determine children's eligibility rather than delaying or denying health coverage by making families complete duplicative paperwork; and
- Using other programs' findings to expedite the determination of eligibility factors other than income.

It is estimated that the employment of Express Lane strategies could improve coverage for more than 70 percent of low-income, uninsured children, all of whom live in families already receiving benefits through Food Stamps, free or reduced price school lunch, and/or nutrition programs for women, infants and children. Moreover, Express Lane strategies would eliminate duplicative multi-agency efforts to collect and verify income and resource eligibility, making the process for enrolling in the program less burdensome for families and improving program integrity.

As an organization committed to improving health care for all children, we believe that the Children's Express Lane Act would go a long way toward improving coverage for eligible children by helping to eliminate the bureaucratic red tape that prevents data-sharing and serves as a barrier to enrollment. It would also facilitate the use of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to make existing federal programs work better for families and for taxpayers.

We are grateful for your long-standing leadership on this issue, including your recent efforts to ensure that Express Lane strategies are an important component of SCHIP reauthorization. Passage of this legislation will be an important step toward reducing the numbers of uninsured children who are eligible but unenrolled in SCHIP or Medicaid and ensuring that all children across our nation have access to the health care they need. We are grateful for your leadership and we look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to address the health care needs of our nation's children.

Sincerely,

Ralph Forsht  
Senior Vice President