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Fifty-two Groups Urge Congress to Protect Health Care for Kids

MADISON, WI—Fifty-two organizations from across Wisconsin today sent a letter to Congress telling them to protect healthcare for Wisconsin’s kids. Congress has less than 10 days to act to provide federal funds for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and for community health centers—two important building blocks of Wisconsin’s healthcare system. Funds expire September 30.

That is also the deadline for Congress to use special procedural rules to try to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Senators Graham and Cassidy have introduced a new bill that would replace the ACA with block grants of federal funds to states and would cap payments to state Medicaid programs beginning in 2020.

Health care providers and advocates are broadly opposed to the Graham-Cassidy bill, which might be voted on next week, because it would eliminate most of the key protections in the ACA for vulnerable individuals and families. In addition, many Wisconsin groups are concerned that a highly partisan fight would preclude the resolution of less contentious issues, such as the continuation of funding for CHIP.

The Wisconsin organizations’ letter urges the state’s congressional delegation to “reauthorize stable, long-term funding” for CHIP. The letter includes a diverse range of groups, including health care providers and advocates, educators, seniors, and faith-based organizations.

Ken Taylor, executive director of Kids Forward, said that with so few session days left this month, Senators are going to have to choose between two very different paths. “The Senate will decide next week whether to come together and finalize bipartisan compromises on issues like continuing CHIP funding and stabilizing the individual insurance market, or prioritizing an extremely contentious ACA repeal bill that will hurt kids and families and is likely to preclude action on the issues that have bipartisan support.”

“CHIP funding is critical for providing affordable, high-quality, consistent health care coverage for 172,000 Wisconsin children” said Dr. Mala Mathur, president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP). She added that state officials rely on CHIP funding for budget planning.

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates that the elimination of CHIP funding would increase Wisconsin’s share of spending for BadgerCare by \$113 million per year.

Peter Bakken, the coordinator for public policy at the Wisconsin Council on Churches, said "CHIP is an essential support for children whose families don’t have the resources to meet their health needs." He added, “If we fail to reauthorize CHIP, we will have failed in one of our most basic moral responsibilities. Caring for the most vulnerable is the moral and spiritual yardstick for our society.”

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