

September 22, 2017

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
United States Senator for Alabama  
304 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-0103

Dear Senator Shelby:

We, the undersigned Alabama elected officials and organizations advocating for children and pregnant women in our state, write to urge your support of the Hatch-Wyden bill, Keeping Kids' Insurance Dependable and Secure (KIDS) Act (S. 1827). This bipartisan legislation ensures stability for vulnerable children by extending funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for five years. The bill also provides additional protections for low-income children and increases flexibility for states.

As you know, federal funding for CHIP expires on September 30, 2017. Without certainty from Congress on CHIP funding, states will be forced to make drastic cuts to the program. This could mean slashing enrollment, reducing benefits, and imposing higher costs for families.

CHIP is a bipartisan success story. The program was created in 1997 and has been championed by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle since its very beginning. Together with Medicaid, CHIP has helped to reduce the numbers of uninsured children by a remarkable 68 percent. Now is the time for Congress to stabilize the CHIP funding stream and protect the gains in children's health coverage that have resulted in more than 95 percent of all children in America being enrolled in some form of insurance coverage.

The program is designed around what children need. It offers benefits that are age-appropriate, including dental coverage and mental health and substance abuse services, which may not be covered by a family's employer-sponsored insurance.

CHIP plans include networks of pediatricians, pediatric medical and surgical subspecialists, and children's hospitals, which are especially critical for children with special health care needs. Families deserve peace of mind knowing that they will be able to access the care and support services their children rely on to be healthy.

Currently in Alabama, 157,000 children are covered by CHIP, known as ALL Kids in our state. With state budgets already set for the coming year, states are counting on CHIP to continue in its current form. Changes to CHIP's structure – including changes to the Maintenance of Effort or the enhanced CHIP matching rate – would cause significant disruption in children's coverage and leave states with critical shortfalls in their budgets. Given CHIP's track record of success, changes to CHIP that would cause harm to children must not be made. In Alabama, we would be forced to use funds originally appropriated for Alabama Medicaid to keep children covered on CHIP. So lack of continued funding at its current level would mean a double hit for Alabama!

Today, we stand united in urging you and your colleagues to work together to enact a five-year extension of CHIP funding. Securing this critical source of coverage for children and pregnant women into the future is an important opportunity for meaningful, bipartisan action to honor CHIP's 20 years of success.

Thank you for all you do for our state and the children of Alabama.

Sincerely,

Representative Steve Clouse, Chair, House Ways and Means General Fund Committee  
Representative Anthony Daniels, House Minority Leader  
Representative Nathaniel Ledbetter, House Majority Leader  
Representative Mac McCutcheon, Speaker of the House  
Representative April Weaver, Chair, House Health Committee  
Senator Del Marsh, Senate President Pro Tempore  
Senator Jim McClendon, Chair, Senate Health & Human Services Committee  
Senator Greg Reed, Senate Majority Leader

Alabama Academy of Family Physicians  
Alabama Arise  
Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics  
Alabama Children First  
Alabama Hospital Association  
Children's of Alabama  
Medical Association of the State of Alabama  
UAB Health System  
University of South Alabama Health System  
VOICES for Alabama's Children