

For Immediate Release

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KENNEDY, SENATE DEMOCRATS CALL FOR EXTENDING SCHIP

ALL CHILDREN DESERVE A HEALTHY START IN LIFE

Washington, DC—Today Senators Kennedy, Baucus, Rockefeller, Stabenow, Menendez, Brown, and Casey called on the Senate to provide up to \$50 billion for the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), far exceeding the inadequate funding level proposed by the President. The additional funds will not only maintain coverage for the millions of children already enrolled in the program, but also expand health care coverage to the six million children that are eligible for SCHIP or Medicaid who are not yet enrolled in the program.

“SCHIP is even more important today than it was when it began. More and more families are struggling to make ends meet as their wages are not keeping up with inflation or housing costs or rising health costs. More and more employers are struggling to offer health coverage to workers and their families, and many workers offered coverage can't afford it,” Senator Kennedy said. “There's a reason why the program has such support from our Democratic Congress and from Governors and families across the nation. It's based on the powerful idea, that all children deserve a healthy start in life.”

Millions of low-income children are currently insured by the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). This bipartisan, successful program has become a critical component of our country's safety net by providing health coverage to uninsured Americans. With more than 46 million Americans without health insurance, Democrats believe the Senate must act urgently to give vital health care coverage to our country's children.

Below are Senator Kennedy's remarks, as prepared for delivery.

**REMARKS OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY
CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM
*(As Prepared for Delivery)***

Federal Budgets are statements of our national priorities, and we're proud to say that the budget before the Senate this week puts children and working families first. Unlike the budgets of the last few years that emphasized tax breaks for the wealthy, this budget expands education and health care for children. One of its most important provisions is \$50 billion in additional funds for the Children's Health Insurance Program over the next five years.

There's a reason why the program has such support from our Democratic Congress and from Governors and families across the nation. It's based on the powerful idea, that all children deserve a healthy start in life. It means that millions of working families across the country can take their children to a doctor when they're sick without worrying whether they can afford to.

CHIP is a promise to working families of health coverage for their children. It's meant health care for millions of children each year, who can now see a doctor to treat for an earache, for asthma, or for any other illness or injury. It's meant the difference between a child discouraged by disease – or a child healthy and ready to learn and grow.

CHIP is even more important today than it was when it began. More and more families are struggling to make ends meet as their wages are not keeping up with inflation or housing costs or rising health costs. More and more employers are struggling to offer health coverage to workers and their families, and many workers offered coverage can't afford it.

The result is that employer coverage has been dropping and the number of adults who are uninsured has been soaring over the past decade. But because of CHIP, the number of uninsured children has actually declined by one-third during the same time.

CHIP's helping hand, however, is out of reach for many families. 9 million children still lack health coverage, even though two-thirds of them – 6 million – are eligible under CHIP or Medicaid. We must do more to get these children enrolled, through better outreach and by simplifying the enrollment process.

The Administration's budget is an embarrassment. It provides less than half the funds needed just to maintain CHIP at its current spending level, let alone enroll more children. Since health costs are rising, level funding means a cut. Hundreds of thousands of children will lose their coverage under the Administration's budget. Nothing better demonstrates why a Democrat Congress can make such a big difference. Instead of rubber-stamping a cut in CHIP, our budget provides the funds needed to cover millions more children who need health care and can't afford it today. No parent should be faced with a decision like that, and our budget makes