

# **Hospital Group Letter to Sen. Bob Graham in Support of S.1 Provisions that Would Expand Medicaid/SCHIP Coverage to Legal Immigrant Children**

June 20, 2003

The undersigned hospital organizations are writing to express our strong support for the legislative language included in the "Prescription Drug and Medicare Improvement Act" (S. 1) that gives states the option to provide health care coverage under Medicaid or the State Children's Health Improvement Program (SCHIP) to lawfully present legal immigrant children and pregnant women for FY 2005-2007 (Section 605). Current law prohibits any legal immigrant who arrived in the United States after August 1996 from qualifying for coverage unless she has been in this country for five or more years.

We believe states should not be precluded from providing Medicaid or SCHIP coverage to legal immigrant children because of an arbitrary date of entry. Such a policy inevitably means that some children will develop health complications that could have been prevented. In addition to causing needless suffering, the long-term effects of inadequate health care services can prevent children from making a full economic contribution as they grow into adulthood. Similarly, we believe it is arbitrary to deny needed prenatal care to lawfully present pregnant women simply because they arrived after a certain date. From an economic and health perspective, the benefits of investing in prenatal care are well established.

As hospital organizations, the undersigned represent a broad spectrum of providers who deliver important health care services to hundreds of thousands of lawfully present but uninsured immigrant women and children each year.

Because legal immigrants frequently lack comprehensive health insurance coverage, many delay seeking needed health care until they are critically ill. When they do seek care, it is often in a costly emergency department setting, with health care providers absorbing the costs. Until Congress takes action to address the arbitrary cut-off date for legal immigrants to receive public benefits such as Medicaid and SCHIP, caring for legal immigrants will continue to add to the financial burden already faced by many hospitals across the country. Indeed, with hospitals and health care providers shouldering a host of new emergency response and bioterrorism preparedness-related responsibilities the need for congressional action on this issue is more critical than ever.

We are grateful for your leadership on this important public health concern and urge your support to ensure that this provision is retained in the legislation that ultimately is approved by the Senate. Swift enactment of this immigrant benefits restoration provision is a priority for the undersigned organizations.

American Hospital Association  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
National Association of Children's Hospitals  
National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems  
National Association of Urban Hospitals'  
VHA Inc.