

June 20, 2003

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We have serious concerns about the recent letter sent by Secretary Thompson to the sponsors of the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA). The letter argues that, because of budgetary considerations and because legal immigrants are eligible for other services, the Administration may not support allowing the states to cover legal immigrant pregnant women and children in the Medicaid and SCHIP programs. At a time in which the Administration is supporting a tax cut of hundreds of billions of dollars, the argument that \$2.24 billion is too much to spend for a program is not only unpersuasive, it is insulting. This is especially true given that providing vital preventive care is likely to save money in the long run.

Secretary Thompson's letter cites state budget difficulties as a reason to think twice about optional expansions to Medicaid and SCHIP. Yet precisely the opposite is true – states need ICHIA to be able to provide health coverage to these pregnant women and children more desperately today than ever because of their fiscal constraints. Many states have created replacement programs with their own dollars to provide these services; in this difficult fiscal environment these states are best served by the option to cover these populations with federal support. Indeed the National Governors Association's official policy specifically endorses the state options encompassed in ICHIA.

We are also unpersuaded by the argument that immigrants receive other kinds of coverage. Emergency medical care has been offered under Medicaid for many years; it is no substitute for adequate prenatal care or primary care for children. Similarly, while Secretary Thompson points out that the Administration has promulgated rules that allow for the coverage of the fetuses of immigrant women, we are offended by the notion that the Administration would not support the extension of health services to legal immigrant children who are already born.

Moreover, we support the Administration's proposed increase in funds for community health centers; however, these centers generally offer primary care services, and cannot take the place of comprehensive coverage if a child has a chronic illness, breaks a leg, or has other medical needs that require specialty care. It is unreasonable to direct legal immigrants -- whose tax dollars support the Medicaid and SCHIP programs -- to community health centers because the federal government refuses to provide states with the option to provide them with coverage. Similarly, we are grateful for the Administration's support of the

reinstatement of eligibility for food stamps to legal immigrants; however, food stamps provide little comfort to a child with a medical problem.

Mr. President, you have said on many occasions that immigrants and their families contribute enormously to our nation. Their hard work, their tax dollars, and their commitment to the future of this country are an enormous asset. We support the enactment of ICHIA because we believe it is smart public policy, and it is the right thing to do. We urge you in the strongest possible terms to do the same.

Sincerely,

American Association of Jews from USSR
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Friends Service Committee
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Asian Law Caucus
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA)
Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC)
Aurora Charter School
Broward Immigration Coalition
California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative
Care for the Homeless
Center for Independence of the Disabled
Children's Defense Fund
Citizen Action of New York
Coalicion de Derechos Humanos/Alianza Indigena Sin Fronteras
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Community Legal Services
Darin M. Camarena Health Centers, Inc.
El Vinculo Hispano of North Carolina
Family Planning Advocates of New York State
Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
Fremont Public Association
Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.
Greater Upstate Law Project, Inc
Haitian-Americans United for Progress, Inc.
Haitian Women's Program
Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools, Inc.
Hmong National Development, Inc.
Humboldt Park Economic Development Corporation
Hunger Action Network of New York State
Idaho Office for Refugees
Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health

Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigrant Rights Network of Iowa-Nebraska
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence
La Clinica de La Raza
La Metro – Industrial Areas Foundation
Latin American Integration Center
Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service (LSAFHS)
Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc.
Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign
National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League of New York
National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPCLC)
National Council of La Raza
National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA)
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
New Haven Legal Assistance Association
New Jersey Immigration Policy Network
New York Immigration Coalition
Northwest Health Law Advocates
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Ocean State Action
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
Public Justice Center
Refugee & Immigration Services Catholic Diocese of Jefferson City
Refugee & Immigration Services Catholic Diocese of Richmond
Rights for All People
Riverside Language Program
Sanctuary for Families
The Citizenship Project
The Cooperative Feeding Program
The Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project
The Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition
The Legal Aid Society Health Law Unit
The New York Academy of Medicine
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Hispanic Americans, Inc.
Voices for America's Children