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SCHIP Legislation Should Include Provisions to Help Low-Income Americans Afford Private Coverage, Health Leaders Say

WASHINGTON – House and Senate conferees working on legislation to reauthorize the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) should include language enabling more low-income working Americans to take advantage of private health coverage offered by their employers, the president of the Healthcare Leadership Council said today.

“This would be a highly effective use of SCHIP dollars,” said HLC president Mary R. Grealy. “There are working families throughout the country who are offered health insurance by their employers but can’t afford their share of the premiums. Let’s put SCHIP dollars in the hands of these men and women to acquire that coverage for their families.” The Healthcare Leadership Council is a coalition of chief executives of the nation’s leading health care companies and organizations.

The Senate SCHIP reauthorization bill did include language giving states greater flexibility to use SCHIP funds to help access private coverage. It was not included in the House version.

Ms. Grealy said, while SCHIP currently grants states a degree of flexibility, the reauthorization bill should remove existing barriers that prevent better coordination between the federal program and employer-provided health coverage.

“This is a no-lose proposition for SCHIP-eligible families,” she said. “Most employer-sponsored plans offer strong preventive and well-child benefits, and many provide access to a broad array of specialty providers for children with complex medical needs. And, in a case where an employer-sponsored plan is less comprehensive than state SCHIP coverage, the child can still be guaranteed access to all SCHIP benefits.”

Ms. Grealy said this provision is common sense, from both a health care and an economic perspective.

“If employers are willing to put dollars on the table, it doesn’t make sense to leave them there. SCHIP dollars can help guarantee the greatest beneficial impact from those employer contributions,” she said. “And, this approach will enable more families to get their health care coverage under the same health insurance plan with the same network of hospitals and doctors.”