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Markell Signs Healthy Children Bills Into Law

HB 139 would allow health care coverage of all kids at no cost to state;

HB 199 would provide developmental screenings for infants and toddlers

NEWARK – Delaware children now have better access to health care after Governor Jack Markell signed two bills into law on Thursday that expand the state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and provide developmental screenings for infants and toddlers.

"I am delighted to be signing legislation that will make Delaware's children healthier," Governor Markell said. "These initiatives are creative ways to improve health care for children without increasing the costs to taxpayers."

The bills were sponsored by Rep. Teresa L. Schooley, D-Newark, who also is the director of the KIDS Count in Delaware, which collects data on the status and well-being of children in the state.

"I often say that children are 25 percent of Delaware's population, but 100 percent of our future, and really, there is no greater truism that I can make," Rep. Schooley said. "Kids are the ones who will be the leaders of tomorrow's world, so we must do everything we can today to give them the best chance to succeed. And during this previous session, we have done just that."

House Bill 139 expands health insurance coverage for children of families with personal incomes above 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Currently, CHIP is only available to children in families that have an income level less than 200 percent of poverty.

Approximately 20,000-22,000 of Delaware children – about 10 percent – are uninsured, but only slightly more than half are eligible for CHIP and Medicaid coverage. About 9,000 uninsured children are in families that earn more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Under HB 139, a cover-all-kids program will be established, allowing parents to pay a monthly premium of approximately \$170 per child plus administrative costs, which will provide the same level of coverage the child would receive under CHIP or Medicaid. Since the parents will bear the cost of the premium, it will cost the state nothing to implement the program.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for parents to have their children receive health insurance," Rep. Schooley said. "A lot of parents can't get insurance for their kids because many major insurers don't allow people to only cover their children. They often have to buy insurance for their entire family, which can cost more than \$1,000 a month. With this new law, every child in the state would be able to be covered."

House Bill 199 requires screening for developmental delays for infants and toddlers, and requires that private health insurers in Delaware cover the screenings. The bill was recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Delaware Early Childhood Council. Providing these early screenings is essential to ensuring that children are diagnosed early for any problems and

can get treatment as soon as possible. The program will cost the policyholders of these screenings approximately three cents a month.

The new laws will go a long way toward helping to improve the health and well-being of thousands of children throughout the state, said George Meldrum, senior policy analyst with the Nemours Foundation, which treats hundreds of thousands of children each year.

“As we daily confront economic difficulties it is heartening to see that our Delaware policymakers have accomplished so much for children,” Mr. Meldrum said. “With minimal expenditure, these bills provide key insurance benefits to Delaware children.”

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