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### **CHIPRA - an accomplishment to be proud of**

By Joan Alker and Jocelyn Guyer, Georgetown University Center for Children and Families - 01/30/12 11:44 AM ET

Members of Congress aren't getting a lot of credit for things they got right these days so we would like to point one out—passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA). On the anniversary of the Children's Health Insurance Program reauthorization, let's celebrate a popular law that was approved with bipartisan support. Since its passage three years ago, the law has helped drive the number of uninsured children under 18 down by one million. This progress, which has brought the children's uninsured rate in this country to its lowest level on record, is even more striking given that childhood poverty and adult uninsured rates jumped sharply over the same time period.

So if congress isn't going to pat itself on the back, we will do it for them. On behalf of all the families who have had the peace of mind of knowing their children's health was insured through CHIP during these tough economic times—THANK YOU!

During this recession, CHIP and Medicaid have been hard at work helping families unable to afford private health insurance to secure coverage for their children. The two programs together meet the needs of families along the income scale. Medicaid does the heavy lifting for the nation's low-income children, but when families nudge their way up the economic ladder and earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford private health insurance, CHIP steps in to lend a hand in covering their children. Both CHIP and Medicaid have proven to be vital lifelines for families who lost their jobs and their employer-based health insurance during the recession.

In 2009, the CHIP reauthorization was a top priority for congress and the new president, and it became one of the first bills signed into law that year. The words of Representative Gabrielle Giffords help shed light on why the CHIP reauthorization bill was met with a bipartisan spirit when approved by the House of Representatives on January 14, 2009:

"This legislation makes sense...it will help make sure our children are better prepared for learning and success."

The bill breezed through the Senate and was signed into law on February 4, 2009. The signing ceremony was a joyous occasion—one of the last times in recent years we've seen such unity among many of the nation's leading policymakers. CHIP started as a bipartisan initiative when Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) teamed up with the late Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) along with many other bipartisan supporters to push it through congress in 1997. Like Medicaid, it is a federal-state partnership and relies on collaboration between federal and state policymakers to make it work.

So why has the CHIP reauthorization law worked so well?

Americans strongly support investing in children's health. A poll, conducted before the new law was passed, found that 82 percent of American voters supported increasing funding for CHIP. (Now that's an approval rating that any candidate would cherish during this election year!). The funding for CHIP included in the law has helped states to sustain and strengthen their programs even as they've combated brutal state budget problems.

The CHIP reauthorization law is helping government work smarter and respond better to the needs of children and families. An innovative performance bonus provision included in the CHIP reauthorization law has successfully encouraged states to reach out to more eligible children, making CHIP and Medicaid more accessible to families who qualify. The law motivated states to remove unnecessary barriers—like requiring a mailed paper form to renew—that stood between children and consistent health coverage.

CHIP and Medicaid have been a stable source of health care coverage during uncertain times. The CHIP reauthorization law got a major boost from the Affordable Care Act, which requires states to maintain children's health care coverage levels through CHIP and Medicaid. With a weak economic recovery that has been slow to add new jobs with access to employer-based insurance, Medicaid and CHIP continue to be key sources of coverage for children, and, in some cases, their uninsured parents.

So happy anniversary CHIPRA and thanks to congress.

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