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Adopted Rockefeller Amendment Will Improve Children's Health Coverage in Senate Finance Committee Health Reform Measure

Statement by Joan Alker, Co-Executive Director, Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute

The Rockefeller amendment is an important step for children and for the nation. It builds on the success of programs that work – Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). By continuing Medicaid for children and CHIP for several years, the amendment provides states with the time needed to get the new "Exchanges" up and running and to make sure that in practice they can do as well as Medicaid and CHIP in offering strong affordability protections and decent benefits to children.

More work still needs to be done for children as health reform moves forward. It will be important to find ways to assure that all of America's children – not just those in Medicaid and CHIP – secure the benefits and affordability protections that they need. Children rely upon healthy parents to help them thrive so it is vital that health reform also provide affordable, high-quality coverage options to adults.

With the number of uninsured children at the lowest level in over twenty years, it is good news that the Senate Finance Committee decided to refrain from abruptly dismantling the remarkably successful CHIP program and from moving children into Exchange plans without adequate safeguards.

As the health reform debate continues, it also will be important to revisit whether some of the other improvements in Chairman Baucus' mark can be restored, such as a guarantee of the EPSDT benefit for all children to 250 percent of the federal poverty line.

Background

Last night, the Senate Finance Committee adopted a compromise amendment spearheaded by Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), which continues CHIP through 2019 and maintains existing Medicaid coverage for children. States will be provided with additional federal funding, beginning

in 2014, to help with the cost of continuing Medicaid and CHIP. The Chairman's Mark had previously anticipated moving children in CHIP (and some in Medicaid) into Exchange plans.

CCF is an independent, nonpartisan research and policy center based at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute whose mission is to expand and improve health coverage for America's children and families. For more information visit our Web site at ccf.georgetown.edu, email us at childhealth@georgetown.edu or call (202) 687-0880.