



September 11, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Epilepsy Foundation, I urge you to enact a long-term funding extension for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) before the current funding expires on September 30, 2017. CHIP provides health insurance for 8.9 million children nationwide, and it must be reauthorized by the deadline to ensure that coverage for current beneficiaries is not interrupted.

The Epilepsy Foundation is the leading national voluntary health association that speaks on behalf of at least 3.4 million Americans with epilepsy and seizures, including 470,000 children. We foster the wellbeing of children and adults affected by seizures through research programs, educational activities, advocacy, and direct services. Epilepsy is a medical condition that produces seizures affecting a variety of mental and physical functions. Approximately 1 in 26 Americans will develop epilepsy at some point in their lives.

CHIP is a critical source of health insurance, providing high-quality coverage to children in families that earn too much to qualify for traditional Medicaid, but too little to afford other health insurance. In some states, CHIP and Medicaid programs are combined to expand Medicaid benefits to CHIP-eligible children. More than one million people with epilepsy depend on Medicaid or CHIP for access to affordable health care.

When CHIP was first established in 1997, nearly 15 percent of America's children were uninsured. Today, the percentage of children without insurance is less than 5 percent – a remarkable reduction that can largely be credited to CHIP. For the families that depend on CHIP, there are no other affordable options for health insurance. If Congress does not pass a funding extension for CHIP, the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC) estimates that 1.2 million children will become uninsured. For children with epilepsy and other medical conditions who depend on reliable access to care, losing CHIP coverage could be life-threatening.

Without a CHIP funding extension, more than half of states will exhaust federal CHIP funds by spring 2018. Many states are currently in the process of preparing Fiscal Year 2018 budgets, and will begin enrollment freezes and coverage reductions without a guarantee of CHIP funding. Further, as discussion of comprehensive health reform continues, we also urge you to maintain the Affordable Care Act's 23 percent increase in the federal CHIP match rate. This funding makes it possible for states to fully support their CHIP programs and ensure appropriate, affordable access to health care for America's children.

CHIP passed in 1997 with strong bipartisan support. The Epilepsy Foundation hopes that this year's funding extension can be another opportunity for bipartisan agreement. We urge you to immediately bring CHIP to the floor for consideration and to support passage of an extension without adding amendments on peripheral issues that should themselves be granted full and independent consideration. Passing an extension now is necessary to ensure that no child goes without medical care because of legislative delays. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Angela Ostrom, Chief Legal Officer & Vice President Public Policy, at aostrom@efa.org or 301-918-3766.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil M Gattone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" and "G".

Phil Gattone, M.Ed.
President & CEO
Epilepsy Foundation

CC:

Senator Orrin Hatch, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Senator Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee