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United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of our three million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like to submit the following comments in connection with the CHAMPIONING HEALTHY KIDS Act of 2017 (H.R. 3922), which is scheduled to come to the floor this week.

On the one hand, we are pleased that the bill extends funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for five years and certain public health programs for two years. On the other hand, we find provisions of the bill that undermine the Affordable Care Act (ACA) deeply troubling. To pay for what should be routine — extending a bipartisan program that provides essential health care for nearly nine million children and pregnant women — the bill slashes funding for the ACA Prevention Fund. It also shortens the grace period for late premium payments on ACA exchange plans from 90 to 30 days, which would cause hundreds of thousands of people to lose their insurance.

CHIP has a proven record of success in providing high-quality, cost-effective health care for children from low-income families that do not qualify for Medicaid and cannot afford to buy private coverage. That care includes school-based services and providers ranging from nurses to occupational therapists to mental health professionals. Since the creation of CHIP in 1997, the number of uninsured children has dropped by nearly 70 percent. Together, CHIP and Medicaid provide health coverage for 40 percent of our nation's children.

Quality health care is essential for the well-being of America's children and families. Children without health insurance forgo regular checkups and doctor visits, leading to higher rates of illness and absenteeism that undermine the ability to learn and succeed in school. NEA's members care deeply about their students and believe that every one of them deserves the chance for a healthy start in life.

Congress allowed CHIP to expire more than a month ago, so the need for action is immediate and urgent. This is neither the program nor the time for playing games with offsets. CHIP has enjoyed strong, bipartisan support since its inception — recognition of its vital role in helping to ensure that every child comes to school ready and able to learn. We urge you to continue that tradition and reauthorize CHIP with no strings attached.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association