

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

As members of the Congressional Black Caucus, we are committed to ensuring that all children will be better off – not worse off – after health reform than they are now. The House health care reform bill must guarantee all children health coverage that is simple, comprehensive, and affordable.

Significant health disparities exist as a result of our current system, including higher rates of uninsured and underinsured minority children compared to White children. While 1 in 14 White children is uninsured, the statistic jumps to nearly 1 in 9 for Black children. Although only a small percentage of all children in America are in fair or poor health, Black children are more than twice as likely as White children to be in fair or poor health. These trends will continue unless health reform measures account for the needs and challenges facing *all* children.

Despite overwhelming bipartisan support for covering children in national polling, we are concerned that health reform is taking shape in a way that could leave millions of children worse off – not better off – than they are now. Millions of children could face higher costs for fewer benefits. While H.R. 3200 has some positive provisions for children, it does not go far enough to ensure that all children will be better off under health reform. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Representatives Bobby Rush and Bobby Scott both offered amendments to address these shortcomings for children. We believe that any child health bill in the House must include the following three elements addressed by their amendments to make it simple for all children to enroll in affordable, equitable, and comprehensive health and mental health coverage that meets their individual needs. In order to guarantee all children are better off after health reform, we urge you to include the critical improvements for children in the Rush amendments and the Scott amendment in the health reform bill that will be voted on in the House:

The health system must be simple and seamless. There must be a streamlined application and enrollment process to make it easy for children to get and stay enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP. State bureaucratic barriers now keep about 2/3 of the more than 8 million children uninsured children who are eligible for CHIP or Medicaid from enrolling. Without simplifying the enrollment and renewal processes and eliminating barriers, millions of children – and adults as well – will continue to be eligible but not enrolled. We cannot let health reform be a hollow promise. Estimates from The Lewin Group suggest that these simplifications will help close to 3 million children and young adults who would otherwise be eligible but not enrolled under the House bill. The simplification procedures offered by Representative Rush, which build on improvements already in CHIP, will help ensure that the promise of coverage under health reform is met.

Benefits must be comprehensive. Health reform must guarantee every child access to all medically necessary health and mental health services from head to toe to maximize a child's health and development. Children need preventive care, including regular check-ups for their vision, hearing, blood lead levels, immunizations, and nutritional needs. Presently, Black children are 73 percent more likely than White children to have an unmet medical need, and 35 percent more likely to have an unmet dental need. More than one-quarter of uninsured Black children had to delay needed medical care because of cost, illustrating how access to comprehensive care is a considerable barrier for many uninsured children. All children, regardless of race or ethnicity, also need the treatment necessary to address health and mental health problems identified in screens and check-ups, and special help for chronic health conditions and disabilities. Amendments offered by Representatives Rush and Scott will ensure that all children in CHIP, and all children in the Exchange are guaranteed the health and mental health care they need to grow up healthy and become contributing members of society.

Finally, **coverage must be affordable.** To ensure that some children do not end up paying significantly more for coverage and care after health reform, low income children up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$66,000 for a family of four) should have cost sharing protections consistent with those for children receiving Medicaid. High premiums can keep families from getting coverage for their children and high co-pays can discourage them from accessing needed services. President Obama spoke to Congress about the pain of a parent of a sick child who knows that there is something that can make her child better but is unable to attain it because she cannot afford it. Two out of 5 Black babies are born into poverty and 1 in 3 Black children are below the poverty level. From 2007 to 2008 the number of poor Black children increased by 297,000 to 3.9 million. Unless coverage is made more affordable, health disparities among minority communities will continue to grow. One of the critical Rush amendments will ensure cost-sharing protections are preserved for lower income children. *Otherwise, we could spend \$1 trillion on health care and leave more than 10 million children with coverage that is less affordable and less comprehensive than what they have today.*

We ask you that ensure that Representative Scott's amendment is in the final House bill and is not lost in Conference and that Chairman Waxman is held to his agreement with Representative Rush on the importance of his amendments which were withdrawn after a colloquy during Committee markup. As a nation we cannot afford not to give simple, comprehensive and affordable health coverage to all children. The cost of waiting is simply too high. Health coverage for all children is a necessary step towards creating a level-playing field, and eliminating the stark health disparities that exist in our society.

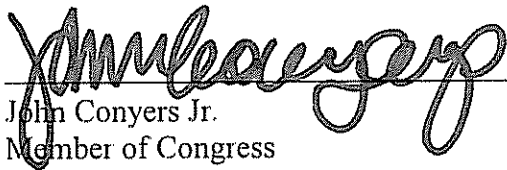
Respectfully,



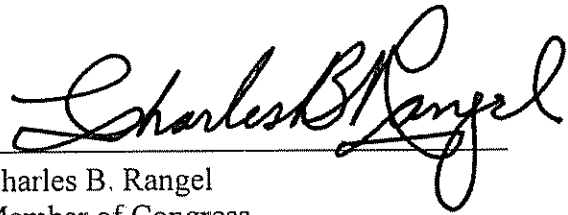
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



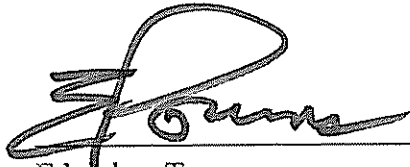
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



John Conyers Jr.
Member of Congress



Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress



Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress



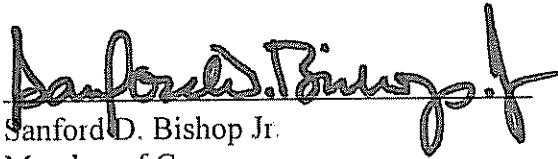
John Lewis
Member of Congress



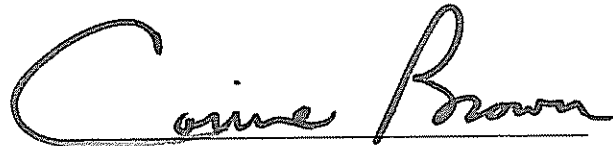
Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



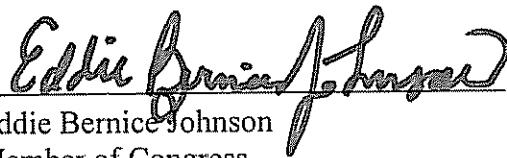
Sanford D. Bishop Jr.
Member of Congress



Corrine Brown
Member of Congress



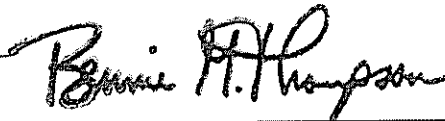
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



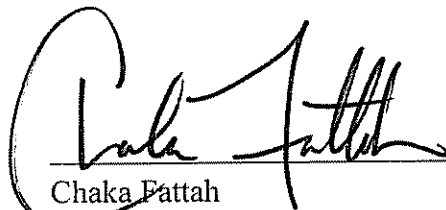
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress




Melvin L. Watt
Member of Congress

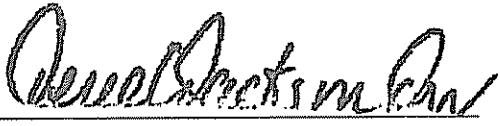



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

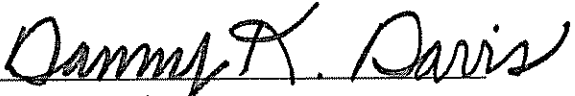


Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

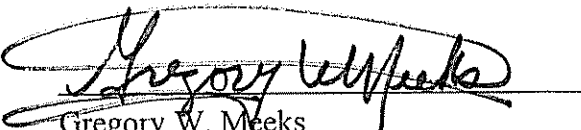

Sheila Jackson-Lee
Member of Congress

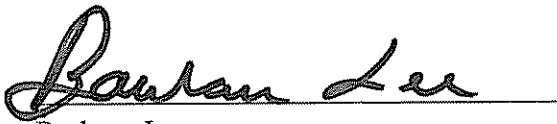

Jesse L. Jackson Jr.
Member of Congress



Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress

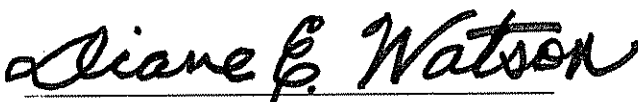

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Carolyn C. Kilpatrick
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

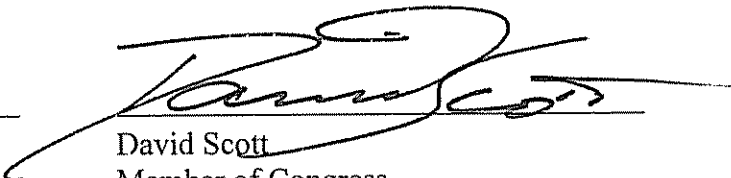

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

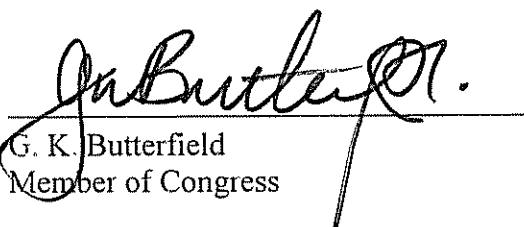

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

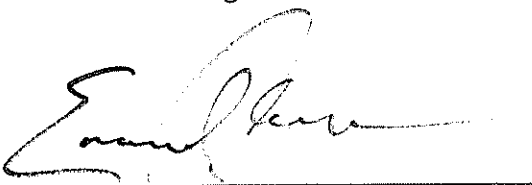

Diane E. Watson
Member of Congress


Artur Davis
Member of Congress


Kendrick B. Meek
Member of Congress

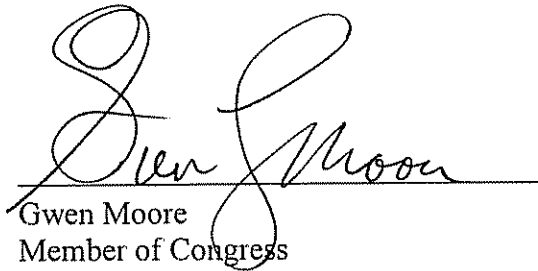

David Scott
Member of Congress


G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress


Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress



Al Green
Member of Congress



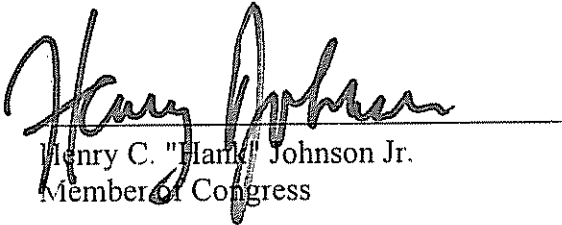
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



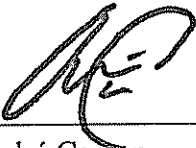
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



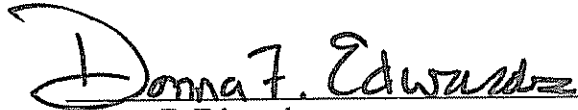
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr.
Member of Congress



Laura Richardson
Member of Congress



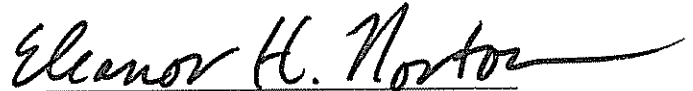
André Carson
Member of Congress



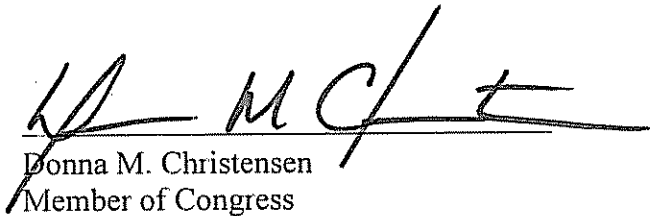
Donna F. Edwards
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Donna M. Christensen
Member of Congress

cc: Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
Majority Whip James Clyburn
Chairman Henry Waxman, House Committee on Energy & Commerce