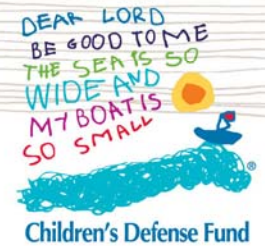


# Instructions for Meeting with Your Legislators

Scheduling a home office visit with members of your legislator's staff is the most effective way to influence their decisions.



## Before Your Visit

**Begin planning for your visit.** Don't worry if you have butterflies in your stomach at the thought of meeting with your legislator for the first time. It would be unusual if you didn't. Know that the best way to communicate with your legislator is to make a personal visit. You probably will enjoy the experience—and the legislator will appreciate the time you spent communicating your views. So, take a deep breath and begin planning!

**Make an appointment.** When making an appointment, explain that you would like to discuss the issue of children's health. If the legislator is unavailable, the aide who deals with health care will be knowledgeable and influential in helping to form the member's views. Don't feel slighted if you end up meeting with the aide. He or she can be very influential and, if your meeting goes well, may also encourage your legislator to meet with you in person the next time. For helpful updates, visit [www.childrensdefense.org/healthupdate](http://www.childrensdefense.org/healthupdate).

**Do your homework.** Study the legislator's voting record on a number of issues using the *Children's Defense Fund Action Council® Nonpartisan Congressional Scorecard* and other sources, so you can comment on something positive, if possible, and know if the legislator has supported expanding health coverage for children in the past. Learn more about the different health reform bills before Congress, how they impact children and whether your legislator has taken a position on them.

**Remember the experts!** Parents, grandparents, service providers, educators, religious and business leaders, doctors and nurses, and others who witness children's needs on a daily basis are children's best advocates. They really are the experts when it comes to how bills and policies will affect children, and it's important that policy makers have a wide variety of people to call upon when they have questions about their work's impact on children. Children's advocacy groups often seek out these everyday experts to present the most compelling information during legislative visits. Tell of children you know or have heard about whose families are struggling to get them the health care they need.

**Be prepared.** Before meeting with the legislator or aide, plan and organize your presentation and practice what you are going to say. If you are going with other people to the meeting, get together beforehand to make sure that you all have the same purpose. Take along helpful information to back up your arguments: newspaper articles about the problems children face, statistics or a fact sheet. CDF can provide some of the information you need. Call the Religious Action Team at (202) 662-3641 or visit CDF's website at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).

## During Your Visit

**Make your message concise.** You may think your meeting is for 30 minutes and then arrive to find the legislator's schedule so tight that you get only five minutes. Know exactly what you want to say and be prepared to say it quickly, if circumstances demand that.

**Present solutions.** People often feel overwhelmed by problems they consider too massive and diverse for corrective action, so don't just talk about the problem. Tell your legislator that no child should be left worse off as a result of health reform. Use the attached talking points as a guide for what it will take to ensure that all children get the health and mental health care they need.

**Talk about what works.** Using success stories of real children and families who are being helped by CHIP or Medicaid will strengthen your argument and counter claims that all government programs are ineffective.

**Search for common ground.** Don't be exclusive or judgmental. Keeping in mind the wide range of viewpoints in Congress and in every community and state legislature, frame your messages carefully to include words and themes that will reach new audiences and persuade them to become new allies. Children's advocates care as much as anyone about efficiency, accountability, fiscal responsibility and personal responsibility. Use themes like these to frame your message.

**Be honest.** It's fine to say you don't know the answer to a question and to promise to provide information later, by phone, fax or email. This also gives you another opportunity to contact the office.

## Following Your Visit

**Build a relationship.** The better your communication, the more seriously you will be taken, and the more willing the representative and his or her staff will be to rely upon you and your judgments. Follow up your visit with a letter thanking the legislator for the time spent listening to your concerns. Enclose any documentation you had agreed to provide to bolster your position, and briefly restate your views.

**Provide additional information.** Send articles, write letters with further information, or offer assistance in thinking through solutions that could work in your community.

**Call periodically with updates.**

**Invite them to speak.** Invite the representative or the staff person who handles children's issues to speak before your congregation or a community group in which you are involved.

**Invite them to a site visit.** Invite the legislator to visit a successful child serving program with which you work, such as an after-school program, conflict resolution program or Head Start class.

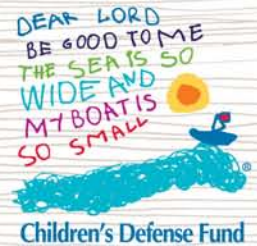
**Show broad support for your concerns.** If your legislator or aide disagrees or is noncommittal, don't threaten or argue after you have made your case, because it is counterproductive. A better strategy is to plan another visit with others to show more community support for your position, to put together a bunch of letters from constituents, or to think of another tactic such as a letter to the editor. Persistence often pays.

**Watch how your legislator votes and respond.** If the legislator votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written "thank you." Such recognition may influence his or her next vote on children's issues. It also lets your legislator know that you are watching closely. If the legislator votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment, and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.

**Report back.** Call or email CDF's Religious Action Team and let us know how your visit with your Members of Congress went. You can reach us by phone at (202) 662-3641 or by email [sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org](mailto:sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org)

# Without Improvements Health Reform Could Leave Millions of Children Worse Off

## Children Enrolled in CHIP Could Be Moved to More Expensive Health Coverage with Fewer Benefits



September 2009

As the health care debate heats up, the needs of children are being pushed aside by special interest groups and loud noise from town hall meetings. Health reform is taking shape in a way that could leave millions of children worse—rather than better—off at the same time that insurance companies and drug companies stand to make billions in additional profits. Under the current health proposals, millions of children could face higher costs for health coverage and have fewer benefits. **No child should be left worse off as a result of health reform.**

Health care reform is complicated, but ensuring that children have access to the health care they need to grow up healthy is not. No matter what type of health care system Congress decides to implement, there are three elements that would make it simple for all children to enroll in affordable and comprehensive health coverage:

### **1. The health system must be simple and seamless with a streamlined application and enrollment process to make it easy for children to get and stay enrolled. State bureaucratic barriers now keep about two-thirds of the uninsured children who are eligible for CHIP or Medicaid from enrolling.**

In addition to keeping children out of health care coverage, barriers like frequent renewal requirements have been shown to actually increase costs by creating major additional administrative burdens. Unless health reform requires states to eliminate excessive enrollment barriers and implement a simplified application and enrollment process, millions of children eligible for health coverage through CHIP and Medicaid could continue to be uninsured.

### **2. 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.**

A comprehensive benefit package recognizes the importance for children of all ages to get regular and periodic screenings and assessments at various intervals throughout their lives. It also takes the next step to guarantee children the full range of comprehensive primary and preventive coverage they need and all medically necessary treatment to address health and mental health problems and chronic health conditions identified through these screens. This level of coverage is widely considered to be the best standard for age-appropriate child health coverage.

### **3. Coverage must be affordable. All children up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$66,000 for a family of four) need cost sharing protections consistent with current out-of-pocket limits in Medicaid.**

Research shows that premiums in Medicaid and CHIP reduce enrollment if the cost is too high relative to a families' income and other expenses. High premiums prevent families from applying and also cause them to disenroll. In addition, high co-payments can dissuade families from accessing needed services.