

December 9, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

As leading civil rights and children's groups, we have joined together in support of health care reform that incorporates three key principles to ensure that children will be better off after health reform and that no child will be worse off. Children's health coverage must be affordable, comprehensive and accessible. In its current form, The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which includes many improvements, falls short of these principles. Without further improvement, it would require millions of children – many of them children of color – to pay more money for fewer benefits after health reform. ***We strongly support Senator Bob Casey's Children's CHIP Amendment, #2790, which would prevent these millions of children from being worse off than they are today.***

While the House bill repeals the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in 2013, we are pleased that, thanks to important changes made by the Finance Committee, the Senate bill keeps CHIP in place until 2019. Without full funding, however, millions of CHIP-eligible children will likely end up in the new untested health insurance exchange before determining that its coverage is at least comparable to that in CHIP. Under this scenario, Director Elmendorf of the Congressional Budget Office predicts that more children will be uninsured in the exchange, as child coverage there will be significantly more expensive for parents than in CHIP. Children of color are already disproportionately uninsured, representing almost two-thirds of all uninsured children. It would be tragic if their numbers increased rather than decreased as a result of health reform.

Additionally, the Senate bill does not make needed improvements in CHIP. It fails to address the bureaucratic barriers that keep about two out of three of the more than eight million uninsured children already eligible for CHIP or Medicaid from enrolling. It also does not guarantee children in CHIP the health and mental health services they need. Children of color are at a higher risk than white children for having unmet health, mental health, and dental care needs. Covering all children is one of the smartest, most cost-effective investments our country can make. It is shortsighted to ignore the vast disparities in children's coverage and health status that manifest themselves in many ways that are detrimental, both socially and economically, to children's futures.

Senator Bob Casey's Children's CHIP Amendment would protect children from being worse off after health reform by ensuring funding for all children eligible for CHIP, making CHIP more accessible, providing children the health and mental health services they need, and establishing a national health safety net for children in CHIP

wherever they live. We are counting on your leadership to secure the passage of this critically important amendment that will guarantee comprehensive and affordable coverage for millions of children of color.

Our partnership is committed to realizing America's promise of covering *all* children and ensuring that all children are better off and none are worse off after health reform. Congress and the President have an historic opportunity to reduce health disparities and improve the health of our traditionally underserved children, families and communities; supporting Senator Casey's Children's CHIP amendment is a critical step to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,



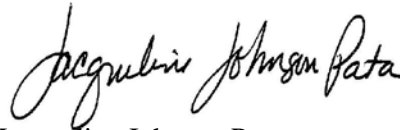
Karen K. Narasaki
President and Executive Director
Asian American Justice Center



Marian Wright Edelman
President
Children's Defense Fund



Hilary O. Shelton
Director, National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People
Washington Bureau & Senior Vice
President for Advocacy and Policy



Jacqueline Johnson Pata
Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians



Janet Murguía
President and CEO
National Council of La Raza

CC: The Honorable Richard Durbin, Majority Whip
The Honorable Max Baucus, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Christopher Dodd, Chairman, Subcommittee on Children and Families, Senate
HELP Committee
The Honorable Robert Casey