

Wisconsin Children Can't Wait – Reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program Now

His diagnosis was dire: Justin, a boy with a brilliant smile and love for painting, has an extremely rare form of lung cancer. His mother, Martha, was told by doctors he may not see his 10th birthday. She is a single working mother who does temp work for local businesses, but does not receive employer based health coverage. Yet thankfully, Justin is covered under the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), providing him and nearly 172,000 Wisconsin children with inexpensive, quality healthcare coverage.

CHIP is a bipartisan success story. Enacted in 1997 with broad bipartisan support, CHIP helps low-income children from working families who do not have access to employer-based coverage, but earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. For children, CHIP offers annual check-ups, immunizations and critical child centered healthcare, including the chemotherapy, radiation and surgery for Justin. Happily, Justin recently celebrated his 11th birthday and is welcoming the New Year.

But unfortunately, due to Congressional inaction, Justin's health coverage is at risk. Funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) expired more than three months ago putting the healthcare of nearly 9 million children across the country at risk. The stopgap patch provided by Congress in late December will not be sufficient to keep programs solvent through March 2018.

The stark reality is Congressional inaction will result in serious consequences for children's health and family financial security. If Congress fails to renew long-term funding for CHIP, Wisconsin will face a \$135 million hole we will have to fill by raising taxes or cutting services.

Our kids, like Justin, can't wait for health coverage. As our elected officials contemplate next steps in 2018 – the health of Wisconsin children should be top of the list. We call on Congress to move swiftly to pass bipartisan legislation that extends funding for CHIP for an additional five years.

Charlene Mouille
United Way of Wisconsin
Executive Director
Madison, WI

Mary Lou Young
United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County
President & CEO
Milwaukee, WI

Renee Moe
United Way of Dane County
President & CEO
Madison, WI

Peter Kelly
United Way Fox Cities
President & CEO
Menasha, WI

Mary Kay Wolf
Great Rivers United Way
Executive Director
La Crosse, WI

Mary Fanning-Penny
United Way Blackhawk Region
President & CEO
Janesville, WI

Megan Hartwick
United Way of Jefferson & North Walworth Counties
Executive Director
Fort Atkinson, WI