



KIDCARE EXPANSION FOR LAWFULLY RESIDING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

SUPPORT: SB 294 (Garcia); HB 829 (La Rosa)

BACKGROUND: The Catholic bishops view access to health care as essential for human flourishing, and have special concern for those who are more vulnerable, including children, immigrants and those with lower incomes.

Florida KidCare is an umbrella of subsidized children's health insurance programs for families whose income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (\$48,500 for a family of 4) through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid. Through a state/federal partnership, it provides affordable health insurance and therefore facilitates access to appropriate health care for children of families with lower incomes.

In 2009, with the passage of the federal CHIP Reauthorization Act, states gained the option to extend coverage in programs like KidCare with federal matching funds to all immigrant children who are lawfully residing in the U.S. Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia now allow legal immigrant children to enroll in their KidCare equivalent and Medicaid without a five-year waiting period. Florida does not.

As the enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) increases, the KidCare program would draw down more federal matching funds and therefore reduce the need for state funds. There are ample resources to expand this program.

BILL PROVISIONS: Removes the five-year waiting period for approximately 19,500 low-income, lawfully residing immigrant children to participate in the KidCare insurance program, an increase of about 1% of total enrollment. Both bills maintain the exclusion of eligibility for undocumented immigrants of any age.

RATIONALE: This promotes healthier children and families in Florida. Where applicable, parents pay their premiums in order to obtain essential health and preventive care. The legislation to expand eligibility for health insurance coverage to lawfully residing immigrant children not only improves their health, but reduces the cost of uncompensated care in the whole health system. Low-income legally residing immigrant children are also more likely to receive preventive care and less likely to use hospital emergency rooms.

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