

Statement for the Record
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Health Subcommittee Hearing
“The Future of the Children’s Health Insurance Program”
Senator John D. Rockefeller IV
December 3, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Pitts, for holding this important hearing today. I also want to thank Ranking Member Henry Waxman for submitting this statement to the record on my behalf. Congressman Waxman has been a leader in children’s access to health care for more than forty years, including his work to create the program under discussion today.

2014 marks the 17th anniversary of one of the most successful programs for improving children’s health in the United States: the Children’s Health Insurance Program—more commonly referred to as “CHIP.”

Eight million American children and families look to CHIP for comprehensive and affordable health coverage, including 40,000 children in my home state of West Virginia. CHIP’s success has played an essential role in cutting the number of uninsured children in half over the past 15 years.

This kind of progress is something we should celebrate. But, we must continue to invest in CHIP so that we can celebrate many more of the program's milestones.

Without Congressional action, CHIP will run out of funding next fall, placing at risk the well-being of millions of children and pregnant women. I hope that the members of this committee will not let that happen.

CHIP is a game-changer for so many children. No other form of coverage provides the same level of specific care and comprehensive pediatric networks at an affordable cost for working families.

The challenges many children face today are still too similar to the ones I saw firsthand in rural Emmons, West Virginia 50 years ago. It was in Emmons where I witnessed the struggles that families go through when they can't afford health care for their children.

I thought to myself then, as I still do now, that no parent should have to carry the stress of knowing you cannot afford health care for your child if something goes wrong. I'm proud to say that ever since CHIP's inception, the program has consistently enjoyed bipartisan, bicameral support. I am also proud to say, as a former Governor, that the support for the program is, if anything, even

greater in the states.

The letters requested by the Senate Finance and House Energy and Commerce Committees have been overwhelmingly supportive of the Children's Health Insurance Program. This support is reflective of the efficacy and quality of the program in its current form, as well as the vital role it plays at the state level. Without CHIP in its current form, Governors across the country would face not only a significant step backwards in children's health coverage but also unexpected challenges to state budgets.

For as long as I can recall, Congress has been able to put aside its differences and come together when it's called upon to do what's right for America's children. And that time has come again.

CHIP is currently at a crossroads. Funding for CHIP must be reauthorized soon; otherwise, the program as we know it will come to an end. As many as two million children could lose their insurance coverage altogether.

This would threaten their health and well-being, not to mention the significant gains we've made over the past 17 years to reduce the number of uninsured children and youth in this country. We simply cannot afford to take this

major step backwards and jeopardize our future generations by allowing CHIP to expire.

Furthermore, states have been budgeting and planning under the assumption that Congress will extend funding for another four years. They simply are not prepared to rapidly develop and implement plans to transition millions of children into other forms of coverage. In short, state legislatures and budget offices are relying on us to act now.

As I said in September when I chaired a hearing in the Senate Finance Committee about the future of CHIP – today's hearing is an opportunity to show the American people that Congress is committed to the health and well-being of our youngest generation by extending the Children's Health Insurance Program.