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POLICY INSTITUTE

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Justice and Economic Security for all Coloradans

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House Passes New Children’s Health Insurance Legislation

Health care advocates applaud the bill’s focus on low-income children, urge Senate passage

DENVER – The U.S. House of Representatives voted today on a new compromise that would reauthorize the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and help provide health insurance to four million low-income children who otherwise would not be covered. The bill passed with strong bipartisan support by a vote of 265 to 142, nearly a veto-proof margin.

“We are pleased with the quick action Congress took today to get this through and get millions of kids the health care coverage they desperately need,” said Adela Flores-Brennan, Fiscal Policy Analyst with the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute. “If this can get pushed through and enacted, it would give some 60,000 low-income Colorado kids access to health insurance who don’t have it right now.”

The new legislation still results in 10 million children getting health care coverage through SCHIP. Changes were made to the legislation to reinforce many provisions that were already in place in the original bill, which Congress passed last month and the President later vetoed. Income restrictions were added to ensure that SCHIP benefits are provided only to uninsured children in families who are under 300% of the Federal Poverty Line (roughly \$60,000 for a family of four).

“This legislation should not be the victim of political posturing,” added Flores-Brennan. “This is a good program with a ten-year track record of keeping kids healthy, and helping prevent families from using expensive emergency room services that drive up health care costs.”

The new legislation also expedites the elimination of health care coverage for childless adults, phasing it out in one year rather than two. Likewise, new provisions in the bill would reduce the percentage of children getting coverage who might already have private health care. Specific language was also added to reiterate that no benefits would go toward undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants have never been eligible for SCHIP benefits.

The latest U.S. Census data shows that the number of uninsured children in this country has increased by more than a million in the past two years. At 17 percent, Colorado has one of the highest rates of uninsured people in the country, and, according to 2005 data, also the seventh highest rate of uninsured kids.

The legislation will now move to the U.S. Senate, where it is expected to pass in the near future.

About the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute

The Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan project of the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, promotes justice and economic security for *all* Coloradans. As both a resource and catalyst, the Institute works for changes in public policy through timely, credible and accessible fiscal policy analysis, education, advocacy and coalition building.

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