

Alaska State Legislature

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Senator Bettye Davis

SB 13 "An Act relating to eligibility requirements for medical assistance for certain children and pregnant women; and providing for an effective date."

Sponsor Statement

SB 13 increases and restores to original levels 12 years ago the qualifying income eligibility standard for the Denali KidCare Program to 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Alaska as one of the nation's wealthiest states is only one of 5-7 states which funds its SCHIP program below 200% FPL. SB 13 makes health insurance accessible to an estimated 1277 more uninsured children and 225 pregnant women in Alaska. Denali KidCare is an "enhanced" reimbursement program with up to 70% matching funds (Alaska currently receives about 66%) under the federal government's State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which was created in 1997. Congress reauthorized the SCHIP program for five years and President Obama just signed into law on February 4, 2009 with expanded coverage for 4 million more children.

Consider the following information from the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, January, 2009:

- 44 states, including D.C., cover children in families with incomes at 200% FPL or higher.
- 33 states cover children in families with income between 200% and 250% FPL.
- 19 states including D.C., cover children in families with income at 250% or higher. 10 of these states cover children in families with income at 300% FPL or higher.
- 35 states allow premiums or enrollment fees, and 24 states have co-payments for selected services in SCHIP programs on a sliding scale of FPL.
- 46 states do not require asset tests

Denali KidCare serves an estimated 7900 Alaska children and remains one of the least costly medical assistance programs in the state at about \$1,700 per child with full coverage, including dental, which is about 20% of the cost of adult senior coverage.

Early intervention and preventative care under SB 13 will greatly increase Alaska children's health and yield substantial savings to the state and public and private sector hospital emergency rooms which must admit indigent and uninsured patients for non-emergency treatment. It is estimated that

uninsured children with a medical need are five times as likely not to have a regular doctor as insured children and four times more likely to use emergency rooms at a much higher cost.

There are still an estimated 18,000 uninsured children in Alaska, or about 9% of the children age 18 and under. Private health care coverage for children has declined over 30% in the last ten years, and the deepening recession is pulling more children and families into the uninsured ranks. The reauthorized SCHIP program and "Stimulus Package" should help, and Alaska should do its share and take advantage of available federal matching funds by insuring its low income children up to and including 200% FPL under SB 13.