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THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2004
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Governor Bush Signs Bill Providing Health Care to More Than 90,000 Children

~~More than 1.7 million covered by state, double the amount since 1998~~

TALLAHASSEE - Governor Jeb Bush today signed KidCare legislation that will provide health care coverage to more than 90,000 additional children, ending the state's current waiting list. The bill contains \$25.2 million in state and federal funding, as well as provisions to ensure the program continues to serve the largest number of children for the longest period of time.

"Once this legislation is signed, letters will be sent to parents throughout the state telling them their children will now be covered under KidCare. I thank the Legislature for moving quickly to pass this bill, and for instituting thoughtful reforms that will ensure the program can continue to help Florida's children," said Governor Bush. "This bill brings important discipline to a program that helps children who have no other health care options because they don't have access to insurance coverage."

SB 2000 provides more accountability, greater fraud prevention and brings the program more in line with private insurance enrollment provisions. It also ensures KidCare recipients have access to dental services and removes the per year cap on benefits.

"I applaud Governor Bush and legislative leaders for their continued commitment to improving children's access to health care and to sustaining the financial viability and success of Florida's KidCare programs," said CFO Tom Gallagher. "Providing life-sustaining health care to the children of families struggling to make ends meet is one of the best investments we can make."

"With the signing of this bill, we are sending a message that taking care of Florida's children is of paramount importance," said Senate President Jim King. "By our quick action, we are now able to provide health insurance to more than 90,000 children - an accomplishment that should make all Floridians proud. I thank the bill sponsors in the Senate, Senators Peadar and Dockery, for their hard work and dedication to this issue, and look forward to many more good bills coming out of this legislative session." "The KidCare Program will serve as a vital safety net for thousands of children who desperately need to be able to see a doctor," said House Speaker Johnnie Byrd. "This compassionate program not only meets the needs of these children, but it ensures that the program will remain solvent in the future. It is a great Republican program."

Among the bill's reforms:

* Eligibility and Fraud Provisions: Children with access to employer-sponsored coverage will be eligible for the program if the cost of coverage is more than five percent of family income, and all candidates must provide proof of income and employer-sponsored health benefit status during application process. Individuals who defraud or attempt to defraud the KidCare program during eligibility determination are subject to prosecution according to the state assistance fraud statute.

* Enrollment Periods: The bill provides for open enrollment periods similar to those available to purchasers of private health insurance. The periods will be announced in August and December, and are on a first-come, first-serve basis. Medicaid-eligible children can enroll in that component of the KidCare program at any time. Sick children eligible for Children's Medical Services will be enrolled on an emergency basis outside the enrollment period, within the KidCare appropriation.

* Accountability: SB 2000 calls on the Auditor General to recommend mechanisms to prevent ineligible children from enrolling and to periodically audit the program. OPPAGA is also required to study premiums and report back to the Legislature on its findings. The Governor was joined at the bill signing by CFO Tom Gallagher, Senate President Jim King, Senator Nancy Argenziano, Senator Mike Fasano, Senator Durell Peadar, Representative Bruce Kyle, Representative Rafael Arza, Representative Frank Farkas, Representative Carole Green, Representative Ed Homan, Representative Stan Mayfield, Representative Sandra L. Murman, Representative Marco Rubio and Representative Joseph R. Spratt. Also joining the Governor were Rose Naff of Healthy Kids and Department of Health Secretary Dr. John Agwunobi.

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