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Group gathers to support wider health coverage

By DAVID HAYES
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When Ebony Bell received a \$2-an-hour raise, it cost her and her son Christopher a lot more.

The pay raise made the Bells ineligible for Medicaid. That means an extra \$195 a month out of Bell's pocket for 3-year-old Christopher's asthma medicine.

Christopher is one of an estimated 120,000 children in Missouri who are not covered by health insurance.

Both mother and son joined the Kansas City Church Community Organization for a health summit Saturday morning to rally support for government efforts to provide health insurance for the nation's 9 million uninsured children.

Backed by more than a dozen federal, state and local legislators, those in the crowd of more than 180 were urged to press lawmakers to fund State Children's Health Insurance Programs and local safety net programs.

Congress has approved a five-year, \$50 billion increase for the programs, putting the allocation in a supplemental appropriations bill that includes funding for the Iraq war.

"Yes, we celebrate this victory, but the battle isn't over yet," said the Rev. Kim Ross, one of two people co-chairing the summit.

U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a Missouri Democrat, told the crowd that "in all probability," President Bush would veto the bill.

State representatives called on local residents to lobby in Jefferson City for health-care funding. The state cut off Medicaid funding to thousands of low-income Missourians in 2005.

"It's crucial that you come down to stamp on the ground and holler about what they're doing to our children," state Rep. Craig Bland, a Kansas City Democrat, told the crowd. "It's a catastrophe."

A half-dozen newly elected Kansas City Council members also said they would work to make sure the city's health levy is used for a health-care safety net for the poor, not to shore up the city budget.

Representatives from more than 45 local churches and civic and health-care organizations attended the session at Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church.

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