

Protecting the health of children

Partisan politics has no place in debate over insurance for all kids

TAMARA YNTEMA
GUEST COLUMNIST

We all benefit when children get the care they need to grow up into healthy, productive citizens.

That's why there is growing momentum to solve the problem of the 9 million uninsured children in the United States, including the more than 733,000 children who lack coverage in Florida and more than 12,000 in Brevard County.

Recently, five people from Brevard who are members of the faith-based Congregations for Community Action joined over 400 people from a national organization, People Improving Communities Through Organizing, in Washington, D.C.

They visited members of Congress to discuss children's health care. Ordinary citizens -- Democrats, Republicans, Catholics, Baptists, Muslims and Jews -- were all involved.

In Florida, the state's Florida KidCare program offers low cost health insurance for uninsured children. It is available at low or no cost depending on family income.

But Florida is facing a \$116 million shortfall in federal funding for the program beginning in 2009.

Meanwhile, according to the Florida Health Insurance Study, one in every 10 children in Florida is not covered by health insurance.

Sixteen Floridians also met with Gov. Charlie Crist's representative in Washington to discuss improvements to make the KidCare application process easier and ways to increase enrollment.

Gov. Crist's office was very receptive to improving the program, and one suggested change has already been implemented.

The on-line application used to expire in just 30 minutes. The local group suggested allowing more time to fill out the application on-line. Their suggestion was implemented and now it has been changed to allow 30 minutes per section.

In Washington, People Improving Communities Through Organizing asked for \$60 billion dollars over five years to fund the children's health care programs nationwide.

Recently, more than 200 prominent clergy affiliated with the group also released a letter to Congressional leaders, calling on the budget committees to find the \$60 billion needed to cover all children.

So far, the Senate Budget Committee approved \$50 billion over five years in new funding for children's health as part of reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

This is a big win for children in the first round of a fight to win affordable health coverage for all kids. The full Senate still must approve the plan when it takes up the budget soon.

We need our members of Congress from both sides of the aisle to see this as a family issue, not a partisan issue.

Congress can find funding for it without adding to the deficit or raising taxes. Some 84 percent of Americans want to see federal children's health programs expanded to cover all children.

The fight is not over, and your help is important. We are the richest nation in the world and we can provide health care for all of our children.

Let your voice be heard.

To get involved, visit www.coverallchildren.org. You can also contact Kathy Drane at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Melbourne, 723-3636, for more information.

Yntema is a member of Congregations for Community Action in Brevard County. She lives in Melbourne Village.