American Hospital Association

Liberty Place, Suite 700
325 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004-2802
(202) 638-1100 Phone
www.aha.org

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United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Hospital Association (AHA) and our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems, and other health care organizations, and our 38,000 individual members, I am writing to express our strong support for H.R. 2, the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) has been instrumental in providing health care coverage to more than 7 million low-income children. This legislation will secure coverage for those children and add coverage to approximately 4 million more uninsured children, most of whom are eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP but not enrolled. The restructuring of the state allotments, along with the increased funding amounts, will allow states to cover more children while preventing the shortfalls that have recently plagued the program. Congress must act before SCHIP expires March 31 to ensure that this vital program continues to operate.

To fund SCHIP, we support increasing the federal tax on tobacco, and in particular we support the provision that will prospectively ban physician self-referral to hospitals in which they have an ownership interest. The AHA has long advocated for such a ban because of the potential for self-referral to cause a conflict between the needs of the patient and the financial interests of the physician. We also support provisions that eliminate the five-year waiting period for optional coverage under SCHIP of legal immigrant children and pregnant women, and that improve coverage of dental and mental health benefits for children.

Thank you for your interest in improving the SCHIP program and providing uninsured, low-income children with the health care coverage they need and deserve, along with important restrictions on physician self-referral. We look forward to working with you to ensure passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009.

Sincerely,

Rick Pollack
Executive Vice President