



Children's Defense Fund

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## **CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND HAILS NY STATE'S PRESERVATION OF ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR WORKING FAMILIES**

The Children's Defense Fund – New York praised the New York State Legislature and Governor George Pataki for restoring to this year's state budget the adult Facilitated Enrollment program that enables hundreds of thousands of low-income workers to gain access to the health care to which they are entitled.

"Hundreds of grassroots groups and others from all over New York State came together to fight to maintain this vital program," said Donna Lawrence, executive director of the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund. "We are so relieved that Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno saw the wisdom of putting adult facilitated enrollment back in New York's budget and that Governor Pataki agreed to leave it there."

The Facilitated Enrollment program allows community-based organizations and health plans to enroll qualified individuals in Medicaid, Family Health Plus, and Child Health Plus the main source of health care for New York's poor and low-income residents. Under the Governor's proposed budget, these organizations would have lost the authority to provide enrollment assistance to adults and the \$10 million in funding necessary to staff the community-based programs.

Over the last five years, the number of uninsured children has dropped by 34 percent from 729,000 to 479,000 in New York State as a result of Facilitated Enrollment and other initiatives designed to simplify access.

"Loss of the Facilitated Enrollment program would have meant that the only way for adults to sign up for these vital programs would be to travel—sometimes as much as 60 miles—to a Medicaid office and give up two or three mornings of work," said Lawrence. "Now poor and low-income workers will continue to be encouraged to get access to the health care they need for themselves and their families through programs in their own neighborhoods."

Estimates show that about half the New Yorkers currently applying for Medicaid, Family Health Plus, and Child Health Plus were enrolled through the health plans and community-based programs. When Facilitated Enrollment was threatened, CDF led a campaign that included public awareness, legislative visits, postcards, letters and phone call days to see to it that it was restored.

"New Yorkers pulled together on behalf of their neighbors to preserve access to this vital part of the safety net," said Lawrence. "The health of hundreds of thousands of families depended on it, and our state came through."

Lawrence noted, however, "The fight for health care for poor and low-income children and their families continues now in Washington where we must convince Congress and the President to prevent deep cuts to Medicaid nationally."