

Healthy PA Testimony – January 3, 2014
Colleen McCauley, Health Policy Director
Public Citizens for Children and Youth

My name is Colleen McCauley, and I am the Health Policy Director at Public Citizens for Children and Youth or PCCY which is an advocacy and policy organization working on behalf of children in southeastern PA.

First, I'd like to begin with a story. PCCY operates a telephone Helpline that assists parents and child-serving professionals apply for CHIP and Medicaid and find health care services. We recently received a call about Elena, a ten year old student in a Philadelphia parochial school who needs a tooth pulled and a root canal. Because she and her parents are undocumented immigrants, Elena is not eligible for CHIP or Medicaid and her parents cannot afford to pay for private dental care. Her mother does not speak English, but her school nurse helped refer her to a mobile dentist that provides free care. Unfortunately, the procedures Elena requires are too complicated for them to handle and, as of today, Elena is still living with chronic mouth pain that is affecting her ability to concentrate in school.

Elena is a child, and ALL children should be eligible for public health insurance. It shouldn't matter what her immigration status is. Elena should not be punished and remain in physical pain because of her parent's actions.

I've been a nurse for 22 years, and for nearly a decade I worked in a community health center, and we had a policy of providing care to everyone who walked through our door regardless of insurance status, ability to pay and immigration status. As a nurse, it would be unconscionable for me to pick and choose which child's mouth infection or asthma attack or painful sprained ankle I would help treat based on the child's immigration status. Could you imagine yourself looking into the eyes of a ten year old in pain, denying her care and sending her back home in pain because of a decision her parents made? Children have no control over their parent's

choice to bring them lawfully or unlawfully into the country. Consequently, children should *not* be penalized for the actions of their parents and *should* be afforded coverage through CHIP. In 2006, the Pennsylvania legislature enacted *Cover All Kids* - a sweeping reform of the CHIP program that extended coverage to *almost* all children – all children *except* those who do “not meet the citizenship requirements of Title XXI of the Social Security Act.” These 13 words bar children whose parents entered the county with them illegally from enrolling in the state’s CHIP program.

Pennsylvania can join the ranks of states and localities that have chosen to use their own resources to cover the cost of health coverage for children who are undocumented – and these include Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, Washington and the District of Columbia.

Coverage is still missing for some people in the Healthy PA plan – specifically for the estimated 47,000 vulnerable children who live in the commonwealth and are undocumented and most likely uninsured.

Healthy PA has already done some good for children. The Governor and the legislature immediately acted on the Healthy PA proposal to eliminate a waiting period for some children to get into CHIP and they reauthorized the program as well. But Healthy PA can do better for more children and require that truly ALL kids be covered.

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Dr. Judith Silver, Pediatric Psychologist, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia &
Vice President, Board of Directors, Public Citizens for Children and Youth

Good Afternoon. I’m Dr. Judith Silver. I work at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia as a Pediatric Psychologist and my work focuses on public health issues. Please note that the opinions I am expressing today are my own and I am not representing CHOP. I also am a proud member of the board of Public Citizens for Children and Youth, a policy and advocacy organization working to improve the lives of Southeastern Pennsylvania’s children.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak with you. today and want to acknowledge that Healthy PA has done some good for children. The Governor proposed eliminating a waiting period for some children to start getting coverage through CHIP- the Children's Health Insurance Program, and the General Assembly immediately acted on that and reauthorized CHIP.

But I am here to share my concern that Healthy PA does not translate into healthy children. As of January 1st this year, the Affordable Care Act mandates that states shift very low income children from CHIP, to the Medicaid program because Medicaid typically offers more robust health benefits for children. Throughout my career I have learned that many children have conditions that require a broader range of services than those covered by CHIP.

For example, we know a family in which both parents are self-employed and their children are covered through CHIP. Their 5 year old daughter has Autism. When she entered school she needed school-based wrap-around behavioral health services, which are not covered by CHIP. Similarly, I know of a 10 year old with hearing loss. His audiologist says he needs his teacher to amplify her voice through an FM system. CHIP does not cover FM systems.

Medicaid covers both of these interventions for children. Compared to CHIP, Medicaid provides a wider array of health services for children, with no limits on the number of treatment sessions or types of services children can receive – including, vision care, Occupational and Physical therapies, and some types of Behavioral Health care

Of the 188,000 children currently enrolled in Pennsylvania's CHIP, an estimated 40,000 of them were eligible for Medicaid as of January 1st, but the Governor has not permitted their transfer to Medicaid. I find this perplexing.

Is he concerned about costs? The federal government is responsible for all the costs of moving these children to the Medicaid program; it will reimburse Pennsylvania at the higher CHIP matching rate for those who are newly eligible for Medicaid.

Perhaps there is concern that there are not enough healthcare providers in some suburban & rural areas that accept Medicaid reimbursement rates. And it is true that the Medicaid Managed Care Organizations will need to expand their provider networks. However, the good news is that it will be easier to attract new providers now, because the Affordable Care Act requires Medicaid plans to provide higher reimbursement rates to primary care providers like pediatricians, equal to or greater than the higher Medicare rates.

In closing, we usually think of children as pretty healthy. But some children have more complicated health care needs and should have access to the services their conditions warrant. Pennsylvania should not compromise children's healthy wellbeing by limiting their access to health care services. I urge you to transfer the 40,000 children in CHIP who on January 1st were eligible for Medicaid to the Medicaid Program.

Thank you.