



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL TAKES FIRST STEP TO BRING BACK KIDSCARE
BUT ONLY GOES HALF-WAY**

The House Committee on Health and Human Services at the Arizona legislature will hold a hearing tomorrow morning on a proposal to restore the KidsCare program for those currently enrolled.

“This is a wonderful first step to bring back KidsCare,” said Dana Wolfe Naimark, President and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance. “With a YES vote, our state lawmakers can strengthen our health care system, our local economy, and the health of thousands of children. But this proposal only goes half-way because it will keep the KidsCare door shut to all new applicants. We need to fully fund KidsCare and end the enrollment freeze.”

In December 2009, Governor Brewer put a freeze on new enrollment for children into KidsCare. Since then, enrollment has dropped from 47,000 children to 36,000.

In March, Governor Brewer signed a state budget into law that completely eliminates KidsCare as of June 15, 2010. Lawmakers later learned that the new federal health reform law removes \$7 billion in federal funds from Arizona’s health care system each year if we cut back on KidsCare after the date the law was signed.

“Keeping KidsCare with the enrollment freeze isn’t the answer,” said Joyce Millard Hoie, Executive Director of Raising Special Kids. “That’s like giving your sick child only half the medicine he needs to get better.”

Arizona is the only state in the country with an enrollment freeze on KidsCare. More than 100 uninsured children are being turned away from the health care they need every day. AHCCCS, the state agency administering KidsCare, estimates that with the freeze, KidsCare will cover only 28,000 children by June 30, 2010 and fewer than 20,000 children a year later.

The annual cost to the state for restoring KidsCare with no enrollment freeze is approximately \$25 million; Arizona receives \$87 million in federal funds to pay the rest of the cost. There are numerous options available to cover the state cost. One option is to restore to the State Department of Revenue the more than 100 auditor and collector staff positions that were cut. By restoring these positions, they can collect taxes that are already owed to the state. The Department estimates that each dollar spent on an auditor brings in \$15 in collections.

A second option is to accept the offer of the First Things First statewide board. In addition to a no-interest loan of \$300 million to help the state through the budget crisis, the board voted last week to offer to pay the state's cost of KidsCare for 2 ½ years using \$60 million in tobacco tax funds. This offer is contingent on lawmakers removing from the November ballot any referenda that would ask voters to let the legislature use the First Things First funds.

"It is time for lawmakers to reverse their mistake and fully fund KidsCare," concluded Naimark.

25 organizations have been sponsoring a *Bring Back KidsCare* campaign, including radio ads, web-based messages, an email campaign to lawmakers, information at community events, and grassroots activities. Visit the campaign at www.bringbackkidscore.org.

Bring Back KidsCare Supporting Organizations

AAUW Scottsdale
American Heart Association, Pacific Mountain Affiliate
Arizona Association of Community Health Centers
Arizona Asthma Coalition
Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Arizona Hemophilia Association
Arizona Parent-Teacher Association
Association for Supportive Child Care
Child Crisis Center
Children's Action Alliance
Fostering Arts-Mind Education Foundation
Keogh Health Foundation
Mothers Against KidsCare Closure
Mountain Park Health Center
PAFCO
Parenting-Plus
Prevent Child Abuse Arizona
Pima Community Access Program
Raising Special Kids
Rehoboth Community Development Corporation
SEIU Arizona
Southwest Human Development
United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona
Upward Foundation

Children's Action Alliance (www.azchildren.org) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of all of Arizona's children and their families through research, policy development, media campaigns and advocacy.

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