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CONTACT:

Susan Nolan
Mike Humphreys
NCOIL National Office
518-687-0178

NCOIL LETTER TO CONGRESS: SCHIP NEEDS HELP

Savannah, Georgia, March 7, 2007 — State legislators took an important step to protect the health of America's children when the National Conference of Insurance Legislators (NCOIL) decided to send a letter to Congress regarding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Gathered here for the NCOIL Spring Meeting, legislators unanimously supported the letter in the Health, Long-Term Care & Health Retirement Issues Committee and the Executive Committee.

The SCHIP letter, sponsored by Representatives Brian Kennedy (RI) and George Keiser (ND), strongly urges Congress to provide additional funds when reauthorizing the popular program and says, "SCHIP has proven itself as a valuable tool for legislators in our efforts to expand the number of individuals with health insurance coverage in our respective states."

The letter will be distributed to Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Charles Grassley (R-IA), as well as Representatives John Dingell (D-MI) and Joe Barton (R-TX). The Congressmen are chairs and ranking members of the Senate Committee on Finance and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, respectively, which have jurisdiction over SCHIP.

The SCHIP program enrolls more than 5 million children nationwide from low-income families that make too much to qualify for Medicaid, but who are unable to purchase policies in the private market. It was created in 1997 and authorized for fiscal years 1998 through 2007 as a federal block grant with a fixed annual funding level.

According to the letter, "Without prompt congressional action as many as 14 states could be out of federal money by October. Out of those 14 states, six states—Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island—are projected to exhaust their resources by May 7 and will be forced to make difficult financial decisions."

The Senate Committee on Finance and the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health have held hearings on SCHIP where families with children enrolled in the program, as

well as state agencies, have discussed with members of Congress the importance of reauthorization.

The Committee met during the March 1 through 4 NCOIL Spring Meeting. The NCOIL Summer Meeting will be held from July 19 through 22 in Seattle, Washington.

NCOIL is an organization of state legislators whose main area of public policy interest is insurance legislation and regulation. Most legislators active in NCOIL either chair or are members of the committees responsible for insurance legislation in their respective state houses across the country. More information is available at www.ncoil.org.

For further details, please contact the NCOIL National Office at 518-687-0178 or at mhumphreys@ncoil.org.

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