

Janet Murguia, President

February 27, 2007

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Madam Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S., I strongly urge your leadership to ensure the inclusion of the "Legal Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act of 2007 (ICHIA)" in the upcoming reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). ICHIA would help many of the nation's legal immigrants – children and pregnant women – regain access to health coverage.

If the current health care gaps that exist for our nation's children are to be adequately addressed, during the SCHIP debate Congress must take steps to address the extremely high rates of uninsurance among Latino children. Of the nine million children currently uninsured, nearly two-fifths (38.8%) are Latino. This alarming figure represents more than one in five (21.9%) Latino children who live in the U.S. Without sufficient health coverage, children often go without adequate health care, limiting their access to preventive and primary care and even precluding them from connecting with treatment when they are ill.

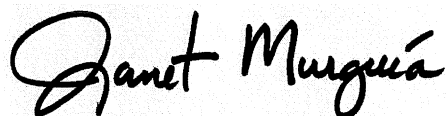
Latino children are more likely to be uninsured than their peers, in part because of multiple barriers that prevent legal immigrants from accessing Medicaid and SCHIP. Currently, legal immigrants arriving after August 22, 1996 face a five-year bar and additional enrollment barriers to these programs. "ICHIA" would eliminate many of these arbitrary restrictions by providing states the option of restoring access to federally-funded Medicaid and SCHIP to legal immigrant children and pregnant women.

Under "ICHIA," Latinos will have greater opportunity to obtain a regular source of health care, ensuring that easily treatable health conditions are not exacerbated. Many more infants and children will be able to receive preventive care services, increasing healthy development and improving their ability to take full advantage of educational possibilities in the future. Further, there is longstanding evidence that savings is achieved when investments are made in the early care of the nation's children. For every dollar invested in prenatal care, it is estimated that \$3 is saved in future care arising from postpartum complications.

Many states recognize the significant role of immigrants in the U.S. and have chosen to cover these communities with their own funds. However, without the ability to secure federal support, states have limited capacity to maintain these programs. This restoration would allow states to make decisions that best fit the needs of their residents, without worrying about inconsistent funding or budget shortfalls.

NCLR reiterates its support for this provision and urges you to build upon your promise to take this country in a new direction, by strengthening the ability of all of our nation's residents to achieve a high level of health. All SCHIP proposals should include "ICHIA" in their construct. NCLR will encourage the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA) to include all votes associated with "ICHIA" and SCHIP reauthorization in its 110<sup>th</sup> Congressional Scorecard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Janet Murguía  
President and CEO