Over the last decade, our nation has made huge gains for children because of the success of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid, which serve as the cornerstones of coverage for one-third of our nation’s children. President Obama’s decision to make children’s coverage a top priority by reauthorizing CHIP on February 4th, 2009 was a critical step forward for kids. With Congress focusing on legislation to reform the nation’s health care systems, this is a crucial time to move closer toward ensuring that every child in America has access to the high-quality health care services they need to grow up to be healthy, strong, and productive adults.

Despite recent gains, millions of children remain uninsured because they cannot afford coverage or because their families face red-tape barriers that make it difficult to sign up for coverage even when they qualify. Congress must address these barriers as health reform moves forward. For health reform to be a success for children it must abide by the following principles:

- **Do No Harm to Children.**
  Health reform should not turn back the clock on the progress our nation has achieved for children’s health coverage. One-third of our nation’s children receive their health care through Medicaid and CHIP. Before moving children out of these successful programs, Congress must ensure that children will receive comparable or better benefits, cost-sharing protections, and access to care under any new program. No child should lose the benefits and cost-sharing protections they already have under Medicaid and CHIP. If we fail make children’s health a priority in health reform, we will spend $1 trillion over ten years but leave roughly 10 million children worse off.

- **Preserve Medicaid.**
  Medicaid provides eligible children with a comprehensive benefits package, including Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) services. Further, it relies on a broader definition of “medical necessity” that promotes children’s healthy development. By providing services for children such as transportation, translation and interpretation, and targeted case management, as well as other guarantee and accountability provisions, Medicaid and CHIP go beyond commercial plans in meeting the unique needs of low-income children and children with special health needs. Further, improving payment rates for Medicaid providers is an essential part of preserving this vital program.

- **Insure All Children.**
  Six million children are eligible but not enrolled in public health coverage. Eliminating red tape and bureaucracy by simplifying enrollment would be the cheapest, quickest and smartest first step toward ensuring that the lowest-income children are covered. Parents should have a hassle-free way to secure coverage for their children through a “No Wrong Door” system that links them to Medicaid, CHIP, or another insurance program, depending on their eligibility criteria.

- **Cover Kids from Head to Toe.**
  Children are not “little adults” and they need coverage that meets their unique developmental needs. Children must have access to the age-appropriate preventive services, medical care, and oral and mental health benefits needed to launch them on a better trajectory in life. Access to the right care at the right time is an essential element of system reform, and Congress must ensure that limits on benefits and high cost-sharing will not create barriers to necessary care.

Protecting and improving coverage for children must be a top priority in health reform. Investing in health coverage for children, particularly routine and preventive care, will help control costs in the long-run and reap benefits that last a lifetime. There are no do-overs for childhood. Congress must get health reform right the first time by enacting legislation that builds on the success of Medicaid and CHIP and improves coverage and care for our nation’s most precious resource, our children.