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A call to 'catch a falling child'

Thousands of children in Louisville Metro are falling through the cracks of our healthcare system. There are approximately 13,000 children in our community who are eligible but unenrolled in Medicaid and KCHIP, the government-sponsored programs that provide what should be a safety net for uninsured children. For KCHIP, there are more eligible children who are not enrolled than those who are.

Another problem is that many children who are lucky enough to get enrolled end up falling out of these programs when it comes time to reenroll every 12 months. State data show that in 2007 over 3,000 children in Louisville were dropped from Medicaid and KCHIP, and we estimate that up to 2,000 of these drops could have been avoided with better outreach and enrollment procedures.

For a community whose economy is increasingly based upon high-quality medical care, medical research and health insurance, it is unacceptable that so many of our most vulnerable citizens — our children — are falling through the cracks.

This situation is especially unacceptable in light of that fact that it was largely created over the past several years by decisions made in Frankfort to restrict outreach and enrollment activities. State workers were pulled from neighborhood health, clinics and hospitals. A face-to-face interview was made mandatory in order to enroll in KCHIP, requiring working families (for whom the program is intended) to take off work to sign up. Kentucky is one of only three states that still require this face-to-face interview.

We understand the challenges that our current budget situation presents to the state, but the situa-

tion in Louisville cannot wait. Various measures of child health in Kentucky show that children in our city have a higher incidence of several serious health conditions than in the state as a whole — including asthma, diabetes and lead exposure. We cannot wait to ensure that the children in our community have health coverage until some day in the future

when changes can be made statewide.

Gov. Steve Beshear campaigned heavily on his intentions to cover all

uninsured children in the state by improving outreach and simplifying enrollment in Medicaid and KCHIP. CLOUT is calling upon his administration to work with the Louisville community to develop a pilot project to implement national best practices in enrolling and retaining children in these programs. Other parts of the country have been able to produce a much higher rate of enrollment than we have here in Louisville and in Kentucky simply by adopting some of these practices.

CLOUT is also challenging all players in our local health care delivery system to step up and play a role in making this pilot as effective as possible. Many have already expressed their support for a local pilot program and their willingness to be a part of it.

On March 31, over 1,000 local citizens will be coming together with state and local officials to launch "Catch a Falling Child." If your organization would like to play a role in this effort, contact CLOUT at (502) 583-1267 or clout@bellsouth.net.

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