



The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 4, 2009

Dear Madam Speaker:

On behalf of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and our public and private member agencies across the country who work directly with abused, neglected, and otherwise vulnerable children, youth, and their families, I write to indicate our support for comprehensive health reform and the Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962), while also urging Congress to not leave children worse off as a result of health reform and to make every assurance possible that children's benefits not be reduced or compromised.

CWLA is wholeheartedly supportive of H.R. 3962's expansion of the Medicaid program to cover individuals below 150% of the federal poverty line. The Medicaid program is a lifeline for so many vulnerable children, youth, and families—including children and youth in foster care—and for children, promises access to needed services through the all important Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit. CWLA also supports the bill's temporary extension of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)'s increased federal match to both the Medicaid and Title IV-E programs. Our nation's economic crisis remains dire and this extension is necessary to support states and ensure that Medicaid beneficiaries continue receiving health services and that children in care get the support they so desperately need. Other Medicaid provisions that are important to CWLA include: automatic enrollment for otherwise uninsured newborns; more efficient access for states and beneficiaries to family planning services; the medical home pilot program; and suspension of Medicaid (rather than termination) for youths released from public institutions.

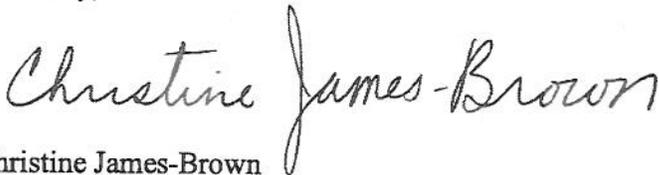
CWLA is particularly appreciative that H.R. 3962 contains two provisions that we and our members have advocated for: funding for home visitation programs and protection for therapeutic foster care (TFC) programs. The home visiting provisions in H.R. 3962 would provide much needed grants to states to improve the well-being, health, and development of children by enabling the establishment and expansion of high quality programs that provide voluntary home visitation for families with young children and families expecting children. These grants are intended to target at risk and vulnerable families and communities who are in need of services that will not only reduce abuse and neglect but also improve the overall health and development of young children. TFC provides medically necessary, evidence-informed, and cost-effective services to at least 50,000 children with severe mental and behavioral health needs in a community-based environment.

We are very pleased that H.R. 3962 continues the good work of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 by including mental health and addiction services in the essential benefits package and requiring them to be offered at parity. For children, it is so important that guaranteed, essential benefits include well baby and well child visits, as well as oral health, vision, and hearing services—as H.R. 3962 states. CWLA is thankful for the generous efforts to help make health coverage affordable for working yet struggling families, by providing affordability credits and cost sharing limitations for individuals up to 400% FPL. We are also supportive of the bill's investments in the health care workforce, efforts to reduce health disparities, and progress to ensure better access to health care in rural America.

As many children's advocates, CWLA is concerned about H.R. 3962's failure to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and for not including—at a minimum—the amendment accepted in the House Energy and Commerce Committee that would have required the Secretary of HHS to ensure children's benefits would be equal or better in the Exchange, prior to transferring them. We hope that as health reform moves forward, stronger language can be inserted guaranteeing that children will not be left worse off as a result of health reform and that their benefits will not be reduced or compromised. Children are our future and it would be immoral to regress and pull back their health coverage when they truly deserve every opportunity possible to lead long, healthy, and productive lives.

CWLA thanks you for your diligence and commitment to improving our nation's health care system and particularly for H.R. 3962's provisions that would directly benefit vulnerable children, youth, and families. We look forward to continuing to work with you—to ensure that children are not left worse off and to enacting comprehensive health reform in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine James-Brown". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Christine James-Brown
President/CEO