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Texas House debates how to restore CHIP funding

1/25/2007 10:49 AM
By: Catie Beck



The [Children's Healthcare Insurance Program](#) (CHIP) was designed to give working parents a break when it comes to healthcare costs for their kids.

But the program needs improvements. Budget cuts in 2003 laid down some tighter rules, like renewing eligibility every six months instead of once a year. Records show about 323,000

children were enrolled in December 2005, and that number dropped to 295,000 in March 2006.

Mary Katherine Stout of the Texas Public Policy Foundation said the six-month eligibility renewal process prevents fraud.

"This is a very generous and rich benefit for these families, and I think it's a matter of personal responsibility that we ask these families to just prove again that they are eligible," she said.

Many Texas House members now want eligibility rules to be loosened for parents who can't afford care for their kids. Some say the extra paperwork is what's causing enrollment numbers to plummet and prevent thousands of children from access to healthcare.

"It's a child issue, it's a moral issue and it's just flat the right thing to do. We need to restore CHIP," Rep. Paula Pierson, D-Tarrant County said.

But for many, it's also a money issue. Proponents of restoring CHIP say the budget surplus should cover it, despite the fact that House leadership said the money has already been allotted.

"I don't believe that all that money is dedicated, and if it is they probably set the wrong priorities," Rep. Garnet Coleman, D-Houston said.

Stout said tax dollars can be better spent elsewhere.




"I think it's very important that we do not take money from taxpayers only to redistribute it around to the many needs that we have," Stout said.

Coleman says more than 60 lawmakers are authoring or co-authoring legislation to restore CHIP this session.

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