



Texas attorney general proposes children's health insurance program

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AUSTIN – Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott has proposed a program that would provide private sector health insurance to uninsured children in the state's child support system.

He said it would be aimed at the 200,000 children in the system who don't have coverage through their parents' jobs or government programs.

"This idea addresses a pressing need for children in Texas in a way that keeps a watchful eye on taxpayer dollars," said Abbott, who outlined the program Wednesday at an annual meeting of the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation.

He did not give a cost estimate for the program, which would require legislative action. Abbott's proposal is the latest attempt to reduce the ranks of the 5.5 million uninsured Texans.

Health and Human Services Executive Commissioner Albert Hawkins said last month that the state took its first step in seeking federal approval to start another program to help low-income, uninsured Texans pay for health insurance.

Some lawmakers and policy experts at Wednesday's conference said Abbott's plan sounds like a good way to reduce the number of uninsured but said they'd need more details to evaluate it.

Abbott said a private insurance company would contract with the state to cover a pool of children. A court could order parents to buy the private insurance based on their ability to pay. The court could order the insurance premiums withheld from a parent's paycheck.

Parents who provide proof of insurance could opt out.

Federal and state laws already require noncustodial parents to meet their children's health insurance needs, Abbott said.

"We are not talking about a new responsibility but a new mechanism to ensure more parents meet their obligation," he said.

About 1.2 million children are in the state's child support system. Not all Texas children whose parents pay child support are in the state system.