



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: S2896 COVID-19 Premium Payment Program
Senate Health and Human Services Committee**

May 3, 2022

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support Senate Bill 2896. This bill would establish a premium payment program to help individuals and families transition from Medicaid coverage to commercial health insurance after the ending of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to thank Senator Miller for sponsoring this bill and would also like to thank the cosponsors, Senators Goodwin, Kallman, DiPalma, Valverde, Lawson, and DiMario.

Unwinding of COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

- Almost half of children in the U.S. are now insured through Medicaid or CHIP, with stability in coverage during the COVID-19 public health emergency due to a continuous coverage requirement. This coverage is likely to expire and end in June 2022.
- It is estimated that at least 6.7 million children nationally are likely to lose their Medicaid coverage and are at considerable risk for becoming uninsured for some period of time.
- Children could lose coverage in one of two ways. They could become ineligible for Medicaid and get lost in the transition to a health plan through the Exchange or lose coverage based on procedural reasons. Children whose household income is above the Medicaid eligibility threshold may become eligible for the federal marketplace. Premium assistance for up to three months on a new health plan would help to ensure a smooth transition and continuous coverage.

Importance of health insurance coverage for children and families

- Rhode Island Medicaid enrollment for Children increased 6.5% from the beginning of the pandemic (116,420 children enrolled in February 2020) to mid-2021(123,942 children enrolled in June 2021).
- Parents' lack of health insurance coverage reduces children's access to care as well.
- Gap in coverage means:
 - increases chance for missed routine or primary care
 - increased emergency medical bills
 - decrease in access to medications for chronic conditions

- decrease in needed specialty care services, like behavioral and mental health care
- are more likely to impact Children of Color

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown on ensuring continuous health care coverage for children and families in Rhode Island.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

