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2,200 Connecticut children about to lose HUSKY health coverage due to increased premiums

***Meanwhile, HUSKY enrollment already dropped by over 10,000 adults
& children since June, in part due to increased red tape***

In the next week, 2,200 children enrolled in Connecticut's HUSKY B health insurance program are scheduled to lose their coverage because their parents could not afford new or increased premiums imposed by the state this fall. The Department of Social Services has sent notices to parents of these children to inform them that their coverage will be terminated as of October 31 if the premium bills, which were due on October 1, are not paid in full. This loss of HUSKY coverage means that these children will likely go without any health insurance, since most of their parents do not have health insurance available through their employers, according to Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization. Meanwhile, since June, there has already been a decline of 10,600 children and adults in HUSKY A, the state's Medicaid program. This decline, which includes a loss of 6,500 children, was likely due in part to increased red tape imposed by the state, in the form of paperwork requirements and eligibility restrictions.

Connecticut Voices for Children has called on the Connecticut General Assembly and Governor Rell to take up legislation to reverse the HUSKY B premiums and reduce red tape in the HUSKY program during the special session that continues this week. When these same premiums were implemented by the Governor and General Assembly in early 2004, approximately 3,700 children were scheduled to lose their HUSKY coverage because their parents could not afford the increased costs. Recognizing the dangerous impact of the premiums, the state legislature repealed them in May 2004 before these families lost coverage. However, the premiums were re-instituted as part of the state budget bill passed earlier this year.

The General Assembly, recognizing the financial pressures facing many families, has taken steps in the special session to help low- and moderate-wage families manage unprecedented home heating costs. "While, on the one hand, we're helping families with the costs of heating their homes, we're asking them to pay more for health care. Necessities are necessities. Reversing barriers to HUSKY enrollment, including the increased premiums, should be part of the relief package," said Ellen Scalettar, Senior Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children.

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HUSKY B is Connecticut's health insurance program for low- and moderate-income uninsured children. HUSKY A, or Medicaid, provides coverage for the lowest-income children.

This potential increase in uninsured children comes as an estimated 136,000 fewer Connecticut residents received health insurance coverage through their employers in 2003/2004, compared to 1999/2000, according to a new national report by the Economic Policy Institute, an economic think tank based in Washington, DC. (This estimate is adjusted for population growth.) *In other words, the number of state residents who have lost employer-based health insurance in the first half of this decade is greater than the entire population of the City of Hartford.*

As fewer workers can get coverage through their employers, they have turned to the HUSKY program for their children. Without HUSKY, there would be many more uninsured Connecticut children, according to Connecticut Voices.

"We should be doing more, not less for hard working families who can't get health insurance for their children through their employers," said Sharon Langer, Senior Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children. "In tough economic times, as health care costs are escalating, we have a moral responsibility to ensure that children still have access to the health care they need."

The following table summarizes the HUSKY B premium changes:

HUSKY B Income Band	Monthly premiums prior to October 1, 2005	Monthly premiums effective October 1, 2005
Band 1 eligibility \$29,767 to \$37,812/year for a family of 3	no premiums	\$30 per child/ \$50 family maximum
Band 2 eligibility \$37,813 to \$48,270/year for a family of 3	\$30 per child/ \$50 family maximum	\$50 per child/ \$75 family maximum

Since the federal government reimburses Connecticut 65 cents for every dollar spent on HUSKY B, each dollar of health care that is "cut" by reducing the number of enrolled children in effect only saves the state 35 cents. Or in other words, children need to lose \$3 in health care to save Connecticut \$1. "In these tough economic times, instead of making health care more affordable for working families, we're making more children uninsured. It's not only pound-foolish, it's even not penny-wise." said Shelley Geballe, President of Connecticut Voices for Children.

Connecticut Voices for Children is a statewide, research-based policy and advocacy organization committed to promoting leadership, policy change, and investment on behalf of all of Connecticut's children and youth (www.ctkidslink.org). The Economic Policy Institute report, *Prognosis Worsens for Workers' Health Care*, is available at www.epi.org.

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