



February 8, 2016

To: Chairman Mello and Members of the Appropriations Committee
From: Julia Tse, Policy Associate
Re: Budget appropriation for the Department of Health & Human Services

All kids deserve the opportunity to grow up healthy and strong. Voices for Children in Nebraska identifies health insurance coverage as an important benchmark of child well-being in our state. **We write with concerns regarding the recommendation in the Governor's mid-biennium budget adjustment request to reappropriate \$73,434,455 of general fund dollars from the Medicaid budget and \$11,146,819 from the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).**

Medicaid and CHIP play a vital role in ensuring low-income children in our state are able to receive adequate medical care. In SFY 2014, these two programs served a monthly average of 160,807 children. It hardly needs to be stated that children with health insurance coverage benefit from preventive care and timely medical treatments when they have a health condition requiring intervention. For many families across our state, access to Medicaid and CHIP means children are able to have annual physicals and immunizations, regular visits to the dentist or eye doctor in time to ward off cavities or identify changes in vision that could impact learning.

It does appear that both funds are operating with a surplus, and given other deficits in our state, a desire to utilize that money is understandable. **However, in 2014, there were 24,795 uninsured children in Nebraska, 5.3% of our total youth population. Of those, 15,335 (61.8%) were low-income and thus likely eligible yet unenrolled in CHIP.**¹ Without insurance, these children are missing out on the benefits of regular health and wellness visits that many of us take for granted.

If we have unspent funds in our Medicaid and CHIP accounts, our priority should be to utilize them in maximizing coverage for eligible children. **Taking funding designated for health coverage for low-income kids and moving it to cover deficits in other areas, such as capital construction for the Department of Corrections, would represent an enormous missed opportunity and set a troubling precedent.**

We thank this Committee for your careful consideration as trustees of our state's resources, and would urge you to leave Medicaid and CHIP reappropriations where they can best reap the benefits for which they are intended: healthier children, families, and communities.

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¹ Kids Count in Nebraska Report 2015, Voices for Children in Nebraska. Also available on Kids Count NEteractive at: <http://arccg.is/1OgzTPR>.