

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 290

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: March 30, 2021 8:00 AM

Joe Higgs, Mr

The Metropolitan Organization and Texas Network of IAF Organizations

Houston, TX

We are writing on behalf of The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) in Houston and the Texas Network of Industrial Areas Foundation organizations in Texas which represent hundreds of thousands of families in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso, Austin and Central Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, Del Rio and other cities and towns in rural areas of Texas.

We are writing to indicate our strong support for HB 290 by Rep. Cortez and the committee substitute, which will reduce the state mistakenly removing children from health insurance due to inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews. The committee substitute will help keep eligible children enrolled in Medicaid health insurance for 2 segments of 6 months of continuous coverage.

Over the last year, we have conducted thousands of virtual small group meetings with tens of thousands of households. We have learned from them how difficult it has been for them to manage their financial lives when they work in low-wage jobs that don't offer health coverage. Many of them have lost income due to COVID and have lost access to reliable internet. Medicaid insurance does a good job making sure that their children have reliable access to the health care they need to thrive. We support the substitute bill because it removes unnecessary checks which are very burdensome for families who struggle to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. We believe the State of Texas and our families are better served with the review protocol in CSHB 290.

By making this change, you will help families maintain health coverage so they can receive access to children's health care they need: mental health care; immunizations and check-ups that prevent serious and costly health problems; treatment when they are ill so they can return to school quickly; and ensure that infants and toddlers get the support they need — including timely screening and referrals for disabilities and developmental delays — during the critical years of brain development during the first three years of life.

Thank you for supporting CSHB 290

Christine Bryan

Clarity Child Guidance Center

San Antonio, TX

Clarity Child Guidance Center is in full support of HB 290. Clarity is a non-profit providing inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services to children ages 3-17. Clarity's patient census is comprised of 70% low-income, state-supported children through Medicaid, CHIP, STARHealth, STARKids and low-cost contracts with area local mental health authorities.

When kids are receiving mental health services, it is important that treatment remains continuous. Unfortunately, there may be times when Medicaid ineligibility processes create a gap in that treatment. We know that if kids continue with their outpatient services, they are less likely to need more expensive mental health services such as residential or inpatient treatment. Clarity feels that following the full scope of eligibility allowed by the federal rule allows the state's most vulnerable children their continuity of care and prevents some of these children from falling through the cracks. On behalf of our kids and families, we ask you please support HB 290.

Elizabeth Ligawa

Printed on: April 16, 2021 7:06 AM

Texas IAF

Waco, TX

Our children deserve the protections of healthcare that is uninterrupted. Annual reviews reduce the incidence of interrupted healthcare which could mean the difference between parents taking their children to regular doctor visits, or being forced to have to utilize the emergency room for care that is customarily handled through primary care.

This bill would have prevented the more than 5,000 children being dis-enrolled in 2019 just due to verification documents mid-year. We can do better than this. We must do better than this.

Georgina Reynoso

The Metropolitan Organization and St. Leo the Great Catholic Church

Spring, TX

I fully support HB 290. As an active community member in my congregation and in my local community, I have seen first hand the pressure that families face when the times comes for parents to renew their Medicaid coverage. Many families often time get busy working and caring for their families that they do not submit re-verification documents in time. Extending Medicaid coverage for eligible children from 6 to 12 months would be of great help to families. This would ensure that children are covered longer without the parents worrying about resubmitting documents. In my experience, a family's income doesn't change in the 6 months after they have applied for Medicaid for their children. I urge your support in the passage of HB 290 to ensure our kids are healthier and for a healthier Texas.

Steven Aleman

Disability Rights Texas

Austin, TX

Disability Rights Texas expresses support for HB 290 by Rep. Cortez, and the committee substitute. HB 290 would cut back on the state mistakenly removing children from health insurance due to inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews. It will support healthy kids by keeping eligible children enrolled in Medicaid health insurance for 2 segments of 6 months of continuous coverage.

Maintaining health coverage helps kids in a number of ways, including offering consistent support for children's mental health; providing reliable access to immunizations and check-ups that prevent serious and costly health problems; helping kids get back to school quickly when they're sick; and ensuring that infants and toddlers get the support they need — including timely screening and referrals for disabilities and developmental delays — during the critical years of brain development during the first three years of life.

When parents work in low-wage jobs that don't offer health coverage, Medicaid insurance does a good job making sure that kids have reliable access to check-ups, support for mental health challenges, and help when they get sick.

Right now Texas has an effective, robust system for checking kids' eligibility when they enroll in Medicaid and again when they reach a year of health coverage. But, just a few months after confirming kids' eligibility, Texas also runs inaccurate, unnecessary mid-year eligibility checks in months 5, 6, 7 and 8 that mistakenly remove eligible children from health coverage.

This legislation would keep kids enrolled in their Medicaid insurance for 6 months at a time to make sure kids don't bounce on and off insurance as often, reduce the administrative burden on HHSC and doctors, and bring down the state's high children's uninsured rate.

Emilie Cunningham, Dir of Programs for Women and Children

Waco Family Medicine

Waco, TX

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According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “changes in the scope of postpartum care should be facilitated by reimbursement policies that support postpartum care as an ongoing process, rather than an isolated visit”. Currently, its practices reflect a "candy wrapper" phenomenon - much interest while baby is in the womb, but the mother is discarded soon after she gives birth. Expanding Medicaid is a must if Texas truly values families.

Sarah Berel-Harrop

Self/Seminarian

Farmers Branch, TX

I urge the committee members to support this bill. This bill provides continuous coverage for children for a year without reapplying once eligibility is determined. We don't need more paperwork and more encounters with the system in order to maintain health insurance. These encounters take up staff time and are unnecessary, and parents of children who are eligible for the program have enough to do without repeatedly jumping through hoops. This is a common sense bill that would improve health outcomes for children in our state.

Monique Vasquez, MPH, MSSW

Central Texas Interfaith - Network of Texas Industrial Area Foundations

AUSTIN, TX

I am an Organizer with Central Texas Interfaith a 10-county network which represents over 50 religions and non profit organizations, and on behalf of the Texas IAF Organization, the largest network of faith and community based organizations in the state, with coalitions in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, the Rio Grande Valley, Del Rio, El Paso, West Texas, and Austin (represented by Central Texas Interfaith).

As a network that supports working families we are strongly in favor of HB 290 which would extend Medicaid coverage for children from 6 months to the full 12 months. This move makes sense, and reduces the burden that families face by removing the mid-year eligibility review that poses a barrier to busy families and puts children at risk of losing coverage. It is time we addressed this flaw in the Medicaid system - over 5,000 children who would otherwise have qualified for Medicaid were disenrolled because their families were not able to submitting their re-verification documents in time. HB290 would remedy this - making it easier for children to stay enrolled and continue to get coverage. In this pandemic we are reminded about the importance of healthcare access for all ages, especially our youngest and most vulnerable. Our parents have enough on their plates, and extending healthcare access for their children for a full year is the least that we can do.

We urge the chair, vice-chair and committee members to vote yes on HB 290 and continue to support this bill and support Texas working families and their children.

Ron Cookston

First UU Houston

Houston, TX

As a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston and The Metropolitan Organization, IAF I support HB 290 by Cortez. This bill will improve the process related to children eligible for Medicaid and CHIP and also reduce one more element of red tape that is hard and costly for the State to administer, but has been demonstrated to do far more harm both to the people of Texas and frankly to the State personnel that have to manage the system than any cost savings that have ever been realized.

Mary Koch

The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) and IAF organization

Houston, TX

House Bill 290 and the Committee Substitute-Children's Medicaid/CHIP

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My name is Mary Koch. I am a member of First Unitarian Universalist Church in Houston and our Church is a member of The Metropolitan Organization (TMO). I am writing in support of HB 290 and the Committee substitute. Passage of this Bill will allow eligible children to remain covered by Medicaid/CHIP for 2 continuous segments each year instead of re-certifying numerous times during each 6-month period. This will avoid many children from being erroneously decertified. Keeping children covered by insurance vastly improves access to health care for well-child visits, preventive services such as vaccines and developmental screening as well as facilitating early intervention for illnesses. Especially during this time of COVID-19, these services are important for children, for their families and for the greater community. Children who are healthy learn better, perform better and grow better. I urge you to support and pass out of your Committee HB290 and the Committee substitute. Thank you.

Jacqueline Hailey
New Hope Baptist Church/TMO
Houston, TX

The idea that children should be subjected to restrictions that put their health in jeopardy is ludicrous. This is not a failure to register for a license or vote. There are lives that are affected. Mean spirited penalties that don't put humans first should not be tolerated! Adequate time to benefit from this service is needed. Continuous eligibility, adequate time to respond to requests for information is a necessity for actual use and success of this program.

Robin Stilwell
Self
Houston, TX

I am writing in strong support of HB 290 by Representative Philip Cortez and the committee substitute. I am a resident of Houston, living in the Westchase District, a member of First Congregational Church of Houston, involved with TMO (The Metropolitan Organization) and Texas Impact, as well as a volunteer for West Houston Assistance Ministries and for multiple Society of St. Vincent de Paul food pantries in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

The value of HB 290 and its Committee Substitute are great for Texas families working in low-wage jobs that don't offer health insurance. These bills will allow eligible children to maintain 12 months of continuous enrollment and coverage in Children's Medicaid/CHIP. The current system of recertification every 6 months as well as a 10-day window to provide missing information is burdensome and inefficient for both families and the agency(s) administering the program. The resulting impact of having eligible children dis-enrolled because of these flaws does not support creating an environment in which our children can have access to the health care they need to thrive and become productive members of society. The State of Texas and our families are better served with the processes in CSHB290.

Thank you for your service to your districts and our State!

Kathleen Fletcher
Voices for Children of San Antonio
San Antonio, TX

We strongly support this very important bill to ensure that children are not left without health insurance and access to appropriate care. The process to frequently re-certify is burdensome--frankly, I doubt that I could or would have been able to keep up with it when my children were growing up. The health of a child is too important NOT to be continuously supported. An added burden on low income parents and possible detriment to a child's health and therefore also their education, is unfair and could be seen as mean and punitive. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Amber Marin
Protect tx fragile kids
Sugar Land, TX
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I appose this bill

Ana Cummings

Self, Retired Federal Administrative law Judge

Houston, TX

I am writing on my behalf and on behalf my parish, All Saints, Catholic church, and The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) in Houston and the Texas Network of Industrial Areas Foundation organizations in Texas which represent hundreds of thousands of families in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso, Austin and Central Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, Del Rio and other cities and towns in rural areas of Texas.

I am writing to indicate our strong support for HB 290 by Rep. Cortez and the committee substitute, which will reduce the state mistakenly removing children from health insurance due to inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews. With families struggling to put food on the table and working at jobs that pay low wages, the monthly requirement after six months of submitting information is burdensome because in most cases the income of the family has not changed since the six month review. The committee substitute will help keep eligible children enrolled in Medicaid health insurance for 2 segments of 6 months of continuous coverage.

I support the substitute bill because it removes unnecessary checks which are very burdensome for families who struggle to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. I believe the State of Texas and our families are better served with the review protocol in CSHB 290.

By making this change, you will help families maintain health coverage so they can receive access to children's health care they need: mental health care, immunizations and check-ups that prevent serious and costly health problems; treatment when they are ill so they can return to school quickly; and ensure that infants and toddlers get the support they need — including timely screening and referrals for disabilities and developmental delays — during the critical years of brain development during the first three years of life.

Thank you for supporting CSHB 290.

Ana Cummings

Anne Dunkelberg

Every Texan

Austin, TX

Subject: Support for CSHB 290 by Cortez, Rose Tuesday 3/30 in Human Services Committee

To Chairman Frank an House Human Services Committee,

Every Texan strongly supports the CSHB 290 set for hearing on Tuesday. I am unable to testify in person but will register in support, and we have posted these comments at www.everytexan.org as well. We thank the Committee members for your consideration of our position.

- This compromise substitute will return Texas children's Medicaid to the process that was in place from 2002 to 2014, and which is still in Texas law: 6-month continuous eligibility for children in Texas Medicaid.
- It clarifies that HHSC will use its available electronic income data sources at the 6-month point to trigger a second 6 months of continuous coverage, as HHSC did from 2002-2014. Annual recertification at 12 months will continue to require a full recertification process, in accordance with federal Medicaid requirements.
- Latest HHSC data confirm that the current policy of four (4) mid-year income-eligibility checks (see graphic link below)-

Printed on: April 16, 2021 7:06 AM

- with just 10 days to reply-- terminated Medicaid for 65,000 Texas kids in 2019.

- Reducing to a single mid-year check with 30 days to provide missing information will eliminate most terminations of children who actually are still eligible.

Our Children's Health Coverage Coalition has provided graphics and statistics based on the original filed bill (which called for 12 months rather than 6 month of continuous eligibility), but the arguments explaining the current system's flaws still apply equally to the Committee Substitute's compromise approach. A helpful graphic illustrating the current, flawed process is here: <https://covertexasnow.org/posts/2021/3/4/lets-keep-eligible-texas-kids-enrolled-in-health-coverage>

Related benefits of restoring 6-month continuous coverage for children in Medicaid include:

- Texas' uninsured rate for children is the worst in the U.S. Updating the Medicaid policies to keep eligible children enrolled will help get Texas out of last place.
- The current Children's Medicaid policy (since late 2014) provides one 6-month period of continuous enrollment, followed by 6 months of month-to-month coverage with 4 monthly income checks and a risk of termination, before the full annual recertification process starts in month 10.
- Families with more than one child—especially blended families-- may be subject to even more than 5 income checks in a year if the children's eligibility periods do not align.
- Prior to 2014, HHSC was able to align SNAP and Medicaid eligibility periods and renewal notices to clients. The committee substitute could allow the agency to rediscover and renew some of those efficiencies and cost savings.

Thanks to the committee for your support of HB290 and the CSHB290.

Anne Dunkelberg, Associate Director
Every Texan (formerly CPPP)

Jeffrey Thompson
Central Texas Interfaith
Kyle, TX

I am in favor of HB 290 by Representative Cortez. It would be a much needed change to the present policy of frequent review of a child's eligibility for medical assistance. It is so very difficult for parents or guardians to have to reapply for the assistance every time some circumstance changes in a child's life. That leads to lapses in coverage which is detrimental to a child's health. This bill would give a child at least 12 months of continuous coverage. I believe that would not only benefit the child but also would save a the State of Texas lot of paper work and staff hours. I ask the Committee to refer this bill to the House.
Thank you.

Kimberly Kofron, Executive Director
Texas Association for the Education of Young Children
Austin, TX

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 290 by Rep. Philip Cortez and the committee substitute, with a zero dollar fiscal note. The bill will cut back on the state mistakenly removing children from health insurance due to inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews. It will support healthy kids by keeping eligible children enrolled in Medicaid health insurance for 2 segments of 6 months of continuous coverage.

Maintaining health coverage helps kids in a number of ways, including offering consistent support for children's mental health; providing reliable access to immunizations and check-ups that prevent serious and costly health problems; helping kids get back to school quickly when they're sick; and ensuring that infants and toddlers get the support they need — including timely

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Right now Texas has an effective, robust system for checking kids' eligibility when they enroll in Medicaid and again when they reach a year of health coverage. But, just a few months after confirming kids' eligibility, Texas also runs inaccurate, unnecessary mid-year eligibility checks in months 5, 6, 7 and 8 that mistakenly remove eligible children from health coverage.

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Diana Tang

The Metropolitan Organization

Houston, TX

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Allison Greer Francis, Mrs

The Center for Health Care Services

San Antonio, TX

I support HB 290 that would allow for 12 months continuous coverage for children.