

*Georgia Dental Society  
P.O. Box 875  
Jonesboro, GA 30237*

March 1, 2007

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Office of the Governor  
Georgia State Capitol  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Perdue:

As organizations committed to the health of all children, we are deeply disturbed by the PeachCare Task Force's recent recommendation to deny more than **250,000** Georgia children a comprehensive dental benefits in SCHIP. Early after federal enactment of SCHIP, Georgia developed its program inclusive of comprehensive dental care. This action by the Georgia Assembly reflected a clear commitment to dental care as an essential service.

The Task Force's new action reveals a misunderstanding of dental care as ancillary rather than essential to children's overall health and wellbeing. It fails to recognize that among working poor children, tooth decay remain the single most prevalent chronic disease of childhood and that tooth decay has significant consequences on children's abilities to eat, sleep, speak, attend to school and otherwise carry out normal functions of childhood.

Currently, **14** states are struggling with State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) shortfalls that leave state lawmakers in the unenviable position of having to find millions of dollars to maintain coverage to enrolled children. This is no small task. Yet to be successful, lawmakers need to make decisions that will be most cost effective, with as little adverse impact as possible. Eliminating dental benefits from SCHIP would meet neither goal. Put simply, it will not only cause undue harm to children but also will ultimately lead to costly treatments for preventable dental disease.

The cost of funding children's dental benefits under SCHIP constitutes only a small percentage of SCHIP spending. Tooth decay remains the most common childhood disease, five times more common than asthma. Early and preventive treatment has a proven track record of cost effectiveness, especially among lower-income children. In fact, low-income children who have their first preventive dental visit by age one are not only less likely to have subsequent restorative or emergency room visits, but their average dental related costs are almost **40** percent lower (**\$263** compared to **\$447**) over a five year period than children who receive their first preventive visit after age one. A three-year comparison of Medicaid reimbursement for dental care in an emergency department versus preventive dental treatment revealed that on average, the cost to manage

Page 2

Georgia Dental Society

symptoms related to dental disease in a hospital is approximately **10 times (\$6,498 compared to \$660)** that of dental care in a dental office.

While those in Washington actively pursue adequate funding for SCHIP, we encourage you to hold the line on SCHIP by maintaining a comprehensive dental benefit. Without your support, Georgia's vulnerable children will continue to suffer needlessly and, ultimately, will become an even greater strain on the State's health care safety net. We urge you to support the continued coverage of comprehensive dental care in Georgia's PeachCare program.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Roy C. Brooks*  
President  
Georgia Dental Society

Cc:  
Lt. Governor Casey Cagle  
Senator Greg Goggins  
Commissioner Rhonda Medows  
Senator Gregg Goggins  
House of Representative Michelle Henson  
House of Representative Lester Jackson

“The Georgia Dental Society Is  
Progressing Through Diversity,  
Excelling Through Unity”

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