

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

P.O. Box 60427

Nashville, TN 37206-0427

Vol. X No. 17

E-mail: council@nhchc.org

Website: www.nhchc.org

Telephone 615/226-2292

Fax 615/226-1656

9/21/05

Urgent health care measure under consideration

Relief Act in Senate would benefit Gulf Coast, protect Medicaid

The United States Senate will soon consider the Emergency Health Care Relief Act to assist the beleaguered Gulf Coast. S. 1716 – introduced by Chairman Grassley (R-IA) and Ranking Member Baucus (D-MT) of the Finance Committee – would most notably adapt the Medicaid program to cover those affected by Hurricane Katrina, and the help of *Mobilizer* readers is now needed to hasten its passage and to call for an extension of its principles to include all Americans.

The enactment of S. 1716 would provide Louisiana, Mississippi, and counties under disaster declaration in Alabama with a 100% federal payment for all Medicaid spending from August 28 (retroactive) through the end of 2006. Every state would be allowed to simplify applications, waive asset limits, and use presumptive eligibility to cover victims of the hurricane, and the scheduled reduction in federal Medicaid matching payments would also be delayed for one year, protecting twenty-nine states from looming cuts. Additionally, health centers and other safety net providers will receive direct federal payments for the cost of uncompensated care provided to Katrina victims. These provisions comprise an appropriate and essential response to the storm and its aftermath, and the bill should be enacted with due expedience.

The needs of those displaced by the hurricane are certainly immediate, but our state of emergency neither began in August nor is it limited to the visible devastation in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The Census Bureau found that 45.8 million Americans went without health insurance in 2004, and the Institute of Medicine attributes 18,000 deaths each year to the lack of adequate coverage. The wounds afflicted by Hurricane Katrina are widespread and tragic, demanding the attention of the nation, but a tragedy of equal magnitude would be for our response to overlook the millions of people whose unstable health and housing situations preceded the disaster on the Gulf Coast. The Grassley-Baucus bill asserts the responsibility of the federal government to provide adequate insurance coverage to the poor and vulnerable victims of Katrina; now let us also call upon our Senators to protect those whose instability results from larger economic and cultural storms.

ACTION:

- **Contact your Senator** in support of S. 1716, the Emergency Health Care Relief Act. Furthermore encourage the *universal* employment of this bill's "relief," stressing the necessity of comprehensive health insurance for *all Americans*.
- **Check the National Council's website regularly** (www.nhchc.org) for updated information on responses to Hurricane Katrina and what you can do to help.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS MOBILIZER

\$15 per year by fax, free by e-mail.

Please pass this on to your colleagues, clients, and Board of Directors.