



An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children (S.762)

Lead Sponsor: Sen. Sal DiDomenico

The House companion bill, H.1309, sponsored by Rep. Dave Rogers, was attached to S.762 with the favorable report to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means.

Background

While 98.5% of Massachusetts children have health coverage, over 30,000 children and young adults can only access limited coverage through safety net programs. Immigration status is their only barrier to qualifying for comprehensive MassHealth coverage.

California, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, New York, and Washington D.C. have expanded their Medicaid programs to cover all otherwise eligible children regardless of immigration status. Connecticut and New Jersey recently passed similar measures.

Why is this legislation needed?

- The safety net programs currently available to certain immigrant children and young adults do not cover or have severe limits on important services. For example, there is no coverage for eyeglasses, in-home nursing or home care services, medical transportation, habilitation or rehabilitation services. There are strict caps on mental health visits, prescription drugs, and durable medical equipment, and other services.
- Inadequate coverage can lead to deferred care, worsening health conditions, and costlier health care interventions, such as emergency department use or longer hospital stays.
- Lack of access has broad implications: health care impacts school performance, lifelong physical and behavioral health, and future earning potential for the child, and the wellbeing of the whole family.

Why is this a health equity issue?

- MassHealth covers many of the state's most underserved young people, but leaves out children and young adults who are undocumented or have certain other immigration statuses, even if they meet all other eligibility criteria.
- Lack of comprehensive coverage is especially harmful for people with disabilities, complex health care needs, or chronic conditions, but is also important to help prevent more acute or chronic conditions.
- Untreated medical and/or behavioral health conditions impact the ability to thrive at home, in school, and in the community.
- Inadequate coverage puts additional stress on families who already experience barriers to linguistically and culturally appropriate care; have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; and may face trauma, discrimination, and/or economic insecurity.

What does this legislation do?

This legislation expands comprehensive MassHealth coverage to *all* young people under age 21 who are otherwise eligible, regardless of immigration status.

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