



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shirley L. Huntley

Healthcare Coverage For Foster Children

SHIRLEY L. HUNTLEY April 22, 2010

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SENATOR SHIRLEY L. HUNTLEY HELPS IMPROVE HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR FOSTER CHILDREN

Study will monitor system to secure adequate health and behavior health services

Senator Shirley L. Huntley (D-Jamaica) announced today that the Senate Democratic Majority Conference passed legislation (S. 5924) to evaluate the quality of health care services received by foster children in New York State. This study will explore whether the Medicaid per-diem and fee-for-service systems for foster children are effective in meeting their healthcare needs.

Under this legislation, the Office of Children and Family Services will be required to appoint and contract an external organization to conduct a study to review foster care health services. The organization will be allowed to collect supplemental information on the history of the child and background information on the foster care givers.

Currently, approximately 70% of voluntary agencies use the per-diem system for children placed under their care. Within the per-diem system a set amount of money is provided to cover the cost of a child's medical care, based upon the number of days that foster child is placed with the agency. The remaining 25% of foster care agencies use the traditional fee-for-services, which allows beneficiaries to go to any doctor who accepts their Medicaid card.

However, evidence has shown that when foster care agencies use both the Medicaid per-diem and fee-for service system, children receive inconsistent coverage for their health and mental health care services. This bill will help make recommendations for improving access to health and behavior health services for children.

"Health care coverage for all children is one of my highest priorities," said Senator Huntley. "Foster children need more help than ever to work through their emotional distress. By authorizing this study, we can be certain they are receiving all of their necessary medical services."

Children belong to the most vulnerable population in the United States and their health must be a priority for our nation. Whether the child has one or two parents, is an orphan, homeless, or in foster care their well being will be a reflection on our society in the future. If the problem is not corrected now, we may have children who grow into Adults with severe health problems.

The health of children in foster care must be thoroughly addressed due the possible shifting and placement of the children in different homes. This can sometimes lead to insufficient information being known about a child's health due their constant moving and transitioning. An overwhelming amount of foster children come from New York City, about 62% of the state's population. Also 47% of foster children in New York are African-American, according to the New York State Office of Children and Families.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, about 500,000 children are placed in foster care because of parental abuse, neglect, extreme poverty and homelessness throughout the United States. As a result, children entering foster care have significantly higher rates of chronic and acute medical problems, developmental delays, and psychological and behavioral disorders than children within the general population.

“This important legislation is the first step to identifying a solution and guaranteeing that a foster child’s medical needs are not going untreated and unaccounted for,” said Senator Huntley. “Adequate health care will ensure that they become healthy and productive adults.”

The Office of Children and Family Services must submit a report by June 30, 2010 to the Governor, Temporary President of the Senate, Speaker of the Assembly, Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Social Services and Children and Families, Chairperson of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families, and the Chairperson of the Senate and Assembly Committees on Health.