

## September Policy Update September 29, 2009

### SBHCs in Health Care Reform

As everyone in the United States knows, President Obama has committed to reforming the nation's broken health care system. Members of Congress have been debating how to achieve the goal of increasing access to health care while lowering costs for all Americans.

NASBHC and the state associations are working hard to capitalize on the opportunities to advocate for school-based health care, a vital part of the health care safety-net for our children. ***And we need your help! Please read to the end of this update, so you don't miss the action steps.***

NASBHC is focusing on those provisions in the draft bill(s) directly affecting school-based health centers (SBHCs). Our two priorities are:

- the establishment of a federal authorizing program for SBHCs, and
- a mechanism by which SBHCs can be reimbursed for covered services under Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

### ***Where We Are in the Process***

#### **SBHCs in the House**

The comprehensive House bill, *America's Affordable Health Care Choices Act* (H.R. 3200), was developed jointly by three committees: Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce, and Ways and Means (collectively called the Tri-Committee). NASBHC and the state associations worked with all three committee staffs to include SBHC provisions in the Tri-Committee bill. We were successful in getting BOTH the authorization and reimbursement priorities included in the draft, which was introduced at the beginning of July.

The Education and Labor and the Ways and Means Committees both finished discussing the bill prior to the August recess and have passed the bill out of their respective committees. As of this writing, the Energy and Commerce Committee is still in the mark-up process, considering numerous amendments to the bill.

***SBHC Victory:*** One amendment, introduced by Rep. Sarbanes (D-MD) and Rep. Dingell (D-MI), and accepted by the Committee last week, will require cost-based reimbursement for SBHCs. This is a fantastic step forward for SBHCs!

*For more information:*

[House Energy and Commerce Committee](#)

URL: [http://energycommerce.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1687&catid=156&Itemid=55](http://energycommerce.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1687&catid=156&Itemid=55)

Once the Energy and Commerce Committee completes its mark up, the bill will go to the Rules Committee, where the rules for floor debate will be set. The Rules Committee may also consider additional amendments to the bill.

The House leadership has announced that they expect to bring the bill to the floor for a full vote of the House of Representatives by mid-October.

## **SBHCs in the Senate**

In the Senate, two committees, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (H.E.L.P.) Committee and the Finance Committee, have been working on draft health care reform bills. NASBHC and the state associations worked hard to advocate for inclusion of our authorization and reimbursement priorities in both committees' bills.

### ***H.E.L.P Committee***

We were successful in getting the authorization language into the H.E.L.P. Committee bill, the *Affordable Health Choices Act* (H.R. 1679). And not only was language authorizing a SBHC federal grant program included in the bill, it survived several rounds of discussions and over 20 amendments that would have stymied SBHCs' ability to provide adolescent care. This is an incredible victory for the SBHC movement.

*For more information:*

[Senate H.E.L.P Committee](#)

URL: <http://help.senate.gov/>

### ***Finance Committee***

NASBHC and the states worked with members of this committee to include language that would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services or the state departments of health to establish a mechanism through which SBHCs would be reimbursed under the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Medicaid. Unfortunately, this provision was not included in the committee's first draft (the "Chairman's Mark"). However, as of this writing, the Finance Committee continues its mark-up, and will be considering an amendment offered by Sen. Stabenow (D-MI) that would insert the reimbursement language into the Finance Committee's version of the bill.

***SBHC Victory:*** Sen. Stabenow offered a second amendment last week that would establish a two-year competitive grant program design to provide short-term funds to assist SBHCs (many of whose budgets have been cut substantially due to state budget shortfalls) to remain open while the federal authorizing program is established and begins making grants. In an extraordinary show of support for SBHCs, the Finance Committee accepted that amendment. What a huge victory for school-based health care!

Once the Finance Committee completes its mark-up, the two Senate bills will be merged to create one Senate health care reform bill.

As in the House, the Senate leadership expects to bring the bill to the floor for a full vote of the Senate by mid-

October.

*For more information:*

[Senate Finance Committee](#)

URL: <http://finance.senate.gov/healthreform2009/home.html>

### ***What Will Happen Next?***

Each chamber is continuing its work on health care reform. If both chambers are successful in passing health care reform bills, the next step will be to combine the House and Senate versions into one piece of legislation. To do that, a conference committee will be established, composed of members of each chamber. The final bill created by the conference committee will have to be passed by both chambers and signed by President Obama.

As we move through the next few months, NASBHC will work to mobilize the SBHC field and bring pressure to bear when necessary to keep SBHC provisions in the health care reform bills.

### ***Broad and Deep Support for SBHCs in Health Care Reform!***

#### **Bipartisan Congressional Support**

Our friends on Capitol Hill have been very busy showing their support for school-based health care.

In addition to the 60 Members of Congress who have signed on to co-sponsor SBHC bills – including Members from both sides of the aisle, we have seen some remarkable, bipartisan demonstrations of support.

Just last week, Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX), and Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX) circulated a joint [“Dear Colleague” letter](#) (URL: <http://ww2.nasbhc.org/RoadMap/Public/HlthCareDearColltr.html>) to other members of the House to express their support of SBHCs. And Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD) featured SBHCs in his newsletter to his constituents, [the Sarbanes Standard](#) (URL: [http://sarbanes.house.gov/release\\_details.asp?id=119](http://sarbanes.house.gov/release_details.asp?id=119)).

#### **Support from Across the Country**

In mid-September, the *New York Times* reported that the White House has suggested that the SBHC program could be cut from health care reform legislation as a cost-saving measure. We responded to this unexpected threat by mobilizing the SBHC field and generating phone calls and emails to the White House urging the President to leave SBHC provisions in the bill. Over 1,100 emails were sent through NASBHC’s website, and many, many more calls and emails went straight to the White House. In addition, the *New York Times* published a letter to the editor submitted by Dara Tom of the California School Health Centers Association.

While we have not heard anything else on this subject from the Administration, we are still encouraging SBHC supporters to contact the White House to express their support.

**Action Alert:** Please contact the White House through any of these means:

## Phone Numbers

Comments: 202-456-1111  
Switchboard: 202-456-1414  
FAX: 202-456-2461

## TTY/TDD (hearing impairments)

Comments: 202-456-6213  
Visitors Office: 202-456-2121

## Other points of outreach

Through White House website: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/>

White House facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/WhiteHouse>

White House twitter: <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

Shortly after the *New York Times* article appeared, NASBHC learned that a misinformation campaign was underway on Capitol Hill to attack health care reform by attacking SBHCs. NASBHC responded by circulating a letter to set the record straight. In just two days, 186 supporters signed onto a [sign-on letter](http://ww2.nasbhc.org/RoadMap/Public/HlthCareReformsign-on.html) (URL: <http://ww2.nasbhc.org/RoadMap/Public/HlthCareReformsign-on.html>) addressing and dispelling false rumors about SBHCs and the services they provide.

We sent the letter to Sen. Harkin (D-IA) and Sen. Enzi (R-WY) – the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Senate H.E.L.P Committee – and Sen. Baucus (D-MT) and Sen. Grassley (R-IA) – the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Finance Committee.

But we're not stopping there! As part of our advocacy plan for the next few months, we are continuing to sign supporters onto the letter, which we plan to send to the Hill again later in the process. As of this writing, we have over 230 supporters listed!

**Action Alert:** Please sign on to the letter by contacting [Alicia Newell](#) , [anewell@nasbhc.org](mailto:anewell@nasbhc.org) .

## More about Health Care Reform

Health care reform is very comprehensive and covers a wide variety of health care related issues. For more information on the larger topic of health care reform, please visit:

- [Health Care for American NOW!](http://healthcareforamericanow.org/) (URL: <http://healthcareforamericanow.org/>)
- [Trust for America's Health](http://healthyamericans.org/health-reform/) (URL: <http://healthyamericans.org/health-reform/>)
- [Families USA](http://familiesusa.org/) (URL: <http://familiesusa.org/>)

Other children's advocacy organizations are disappointed with the lack of language addressing the specific needs of children and adolescents. While we too are disappointed with this oversight, we are very happy that SBHCs have been recognized.

For a summary of the concerns and suggested action regarding children in H.R. 3200, visit [First Focus's website](http://www.firstfocus.net/Download/SidebySide_HealthReform.pdf) (URL: [http://www.firstfocus.net/Download/SidebySide\\_HealthReform.pdf](http://www.firstfocus.net/Download/SidebySide_HealthReform.pdf) ). First Focus is spearheading efforts on a sign-on letter and an amendment concerning the issues identified by the broader child advocacy community. For more information, contact [Susan Kilbourne](mailto:skilbourne@nasbhc.org), [skilbourne@nasbhc.org](mailto:skilbourne@nasbhc.org)

### ***And in Other News...***

September 14-18 was NASBHC's School-Based Health Care Week. Several state associations used that hook to invite their congressional delegations to join them for "virtual tours" of school-based health centers. Through brief videos developed by the associations and posted on the internet, Members of Congress and their staffs were able to see what a center is really like, while SBHC advocates "guided" the tour and answered questions via phone.

NASBHC has also been working on the issue of H1N1 (swine flu). School-based health centers are ideally situated to lead the nationwide immunization campaign. NASBHC created a communications toolkit to assist the efforts of state associations to raise awareness of the role SBHCs could play. In addition, we submitted an op-ed to the *Los Angeles Times* and a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*. Although neither letter was published, we will continue to reach out to the media about this issue.