

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FIRST FOCUS APPLAUDS HHS FOR OFFERING TO SUPPORT STATES IN MEETING HEALTH CARE CHALLENGES**

**Washington D.C.** – Today, child advocates reacted to [a letter sent to governors by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius](#) outlining the flexibility and support available to states that are examining how to make Medicaid programs more efficient while meeting pressing health care challenges in the face of difficult budget circumstances.

**Bruce Lesley**, President of **First Focus**, a bipartisan child advocacy organization, issued the following statement:

"As our nation's economy struggles to recover, the proper role of the federal government is to ensure our most vulnerable citizens are not left worse off and to offer assistance to state governments. In light of the fact that increased federal Medicaid financial assistance to states is ending, **we applaud Secretary Sebelius** for her offer to work with states to find savings in the program without excluding people from much-needed health coverage.

"Since the enactment of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in 1997, State governments have made critically important strides to improve access to care for our nation's children. As we mark the second anniversary of CHIP reauthorization tomorrow, we are reminded that now is not the time for states or Members of Congress, particularly those who voted to extend tax cuts to our nation's wealthiest citizens just a few months ago, to undercut coverage for our nation's most vulnerable children.

"Instead, Congress should take a fresh look at ways to improve the federal-state partnership, including efforts to rein in federal cost-shifts to state Medicaid programs. For example, states could secure significant savings by eliminating the so-called "Medicaid prescription drug clawback" under which states are paying costs associated with the federal Medicare prescription drug benefit. Additional savings for states also could be found by ending the two-year disability waiting period in Medicare. Because those who are disabled must wait two years before being eligible for Medicare, Medicaid provides coverage of last resort for this population at a significant cost to states. These are just two examples of cost shifts to states that should rightly be returned to federal responsibility."

"In addressing these issues, the federal government would properly redress the federal-state

relationship, while also providing states with some fiscal relief and simultaneously improving care to vulnerable Americans."

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*First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. To learn more visit [www.firstfocus.net](http://www.firstfocus.net)*