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National Immigration Law Center Applauds Removal of Five-Year Waiting Period for Legal Immigrant Children to Obtain Affordable Health Care

*Critical Bill Providing Children's Health Care Coverage
Signed Into Law by President Obama*

Washington, DC – Today, President Obama signed into law the 2009 Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA - H.R.2). Passed with bi-partisan support in the House and Senate and with unwavering support by President Obama, the bill reauthorizes the successful Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provides states with federal dollars to provide health coverage to our nation's children. The bill also takes an important step to ensure all children in the U.S. have the opportunity to be healthy by removing the five-year waiting period for many legal immigrant children and pregnant women and allowing states to use federal funding to provide health coverage through the CHIP and Medicaid programs to these future citizens.

“At a time when so many families are struggling, this legislation is a vital investment in our future by providing affordable access to health care to our nation's children, which include immigrant children,” said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center (NILC). “We applaud President Obama's leadership in ensuring our nation prioritizes children's health care, and for ensuring swift passage of this bill at this critical point in time. NILC is honored to have been invited to the White House to witness the signing of this legislation into law that invests in our nation's children.”

Since the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, many immigrant children and pregnant women were required to wait five years *after* obtaining legal status before they could enroll in federally funded health care programs. NILC has worked with many allies for the last 13 years to remove this barrier, which has prevented access to affordable, preventative care, often jeopardizing these children's health. Recognizing broad support among state governments, doctors, health care providers, and a majority of Americans, this bill removes this harmful barrier. As an optional provision, states must now fulfill the commitment the President and Congress made to our nation's children and ensure they get the health coverage they need.

“Five years is a lifetime for a child to wait to see a doctor. Removing this barrier to health care is an important first step to ensure all our nation's children, workers and families have access to affordable and quality health care.” Hincapié continued.

NILC applauds the leadership by Members of Congress who supported coverage for legal immigrant children and pregnant women. In particular, NILC would like to recognize Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), and Representative Xavier Becerra (D-CA).

For more information about the immigrant children's provision in H.R. 2 and the five-year waiting period, see <http://www.nilc.org/immspbs/cdev/ICHIA/index.htm>. Additional information about low-income immigrants and health care is available at www.nilc.org.