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## News Release

### **CHIP Exceeds Enrollment Goal Insuring 20,000 Utah Children**

(Salt Lake City, Utah) – Tonight Utah's Governor Micheal O. Leavitt announced in his State of the State address that more than 20,000 Utah children are enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). This milestone exceeds the program's original monthly enrollment goal of 18,500 by the end of 2000; this puts CHIP ahead of schedule to reach the 21,000 participant goal by June of 2001.

Rod Betit, Executive Director, Utah Department of Health (UDOH), echoed Governor Leavitt's pride in achieving this milestone. "Congress didn't believe the States could design a more user-friendly and cost-effective program than the federal Medicaid program. Governor Leavitt led the charge to get States this flexibility and 14 states accepted the challenge," said Betit. "After two and half years, we know CHIP families appreciate its streamlined application and renewal process and the reasonable family cost-sharing requirements that allow them to pay part of the care. It is definitely a huge success." In fact, largely due to CHIP, the uninsured rate for Utah children has dropped from 8.6 percent (1996) to 6 percent – the lowest point ever attained.

Since 1998, more than 32,000 children of working parents who do not have health and dental coverage for their children have benefited from CHIP. Families who qualify must have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level that for a family of four is \$34,100 per year. The CHIP program estimates that 40 percent of CHIP families obtain employer-sponsored health coverage within one year of enrolling in CHIP. "CHIP is a bridge to self-sufficiency, allowing families to protect their children's health while they get back on their feet," said Chad Westover, Director, Utah's CHIP. "No child should have to suffer because parents are unable to afford or secure health insurance," added Westover.

The program is administratively light, and therefore provides the maximum benefit to the program participants. "We have been able to share resources with other entities in the Department of Health," explains Westover. "For example, we combine common tasks, such as eligibility screening, with other state health care programs." This means that Utah's CHIP families are able to access care throughout the state as CHIP is implemented on a local level. "The entire Department staff contributed to the development and implementation of CHIP and this milestone shows what these capable employees can do when federal rules don't tie their hands," said Betit.

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Outreach efforts and referrals at the schools, churches, and community-based organizations as well as through ethnic associations and doctors' offices have proved successful. Utah's rural areas are sometimes the most difficult to reach but CHIP is boasting 42 percent enrollment from rural Utah. Ninety-two percent of the families enrolled in CHIP rated the program above average and meeting their needs.

Governor Leavitt introduced Utah to the White family of Nephi, Utah. Kristine and Richard White and their boys, 4-year-old Brayden and 11-month-old Preston, are typical of the thousands of kids who currently receive care through the program. (Children under age 9 account for 65 percent of children served by CHIP.) The Whites looked into the CHIP program after Richard's employer's national insurance company ceased operations – leaving the family without coverage. “All of a sudden, we had no insurance and we were expecting our second child,” said Mrs. White. After learning about CHIP on television, Kristine visited her local health department and was referred to a CHIP advisor in Payson, Utah. “CHIP has provided us with advice to enable us to move through this difficult period,” said Mrs. White. CHIP provided health and dental coverage during critical, early medical periods in Preston's new life. Born with a bone abnormality, Preston needed prompt, expensive medical care. “Without CHIP, our family would have had to make the difficult decision to postpone Preston's treatment until we could cover the procedure ourselves,” says Mrs. White.

Even though CHIP surpassed its 2000 enrollment goals (20,389), the UDOH will continue delivering its message to working families who need health insurance for their children while working through difficult life challenges.

Further information on CHIP can be obtained by calling the CHIP hotline at 1-888-222-2542, visiting the CHIP website at [www.utahchip.org](http://www.utahchip.org), or by visiting any local health department. To qualify for CHIP, Utah families need to meet certain income guidelines.

*Note: Photo and interview opportunities with the White family and others are available by request.*

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