



Extending ARKids First to Marshallese Children

What's The Problem?

Children born in the Marshall Islands do not have access to ARKids First health insurance, even though they are *lawfully residing* in Arkansas. This is true regardless of family income and regardless how long they've lived in Arkansas or in the United States. (Most other lawfully residing children can get coverage after a five-year ban.)

What's The Solution?

Change the state Medicaid plan to allow coverage of all “lawfully residing” children whose families meet other eligibility requirements. Arkansas can do this without legislation – only a change to our Medicaid State Plan is required. The change would also lift the five-year waiting period for other lawfully residing children. In total, we estimate that 2,000 children would be covered, mostly Marshallese-born children in the Springdale area. That's less than 1 percent of the children eligible for ARKids today.

More than half the states have adopted this policy since it was first allowed in 2009. The federal provision in question is called the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA), and it breaks down several barriers to coverage for lawfully residing children. So far, 31 states and the District of Columbia have done this.

How much would it cost?

For this coverage, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) match rate went up to 100 percent in October 2015. Usually, the state has a 4-to-1 or 3-to-1 federal match for ARKids coverage, but newly insured kids like those covered under this policy would require *no new state match*.

What's the Impact?

This would help families, health care providers, state agencies, schools and, most importantly, children. Marshallese children are already being served by local doctors, clinics and health systems from Northwest Arkansas to Little Rock's Arkansas Children's Hospital. In many cases, this care is unreimbursed. The same goes for our state Department of Health, which provides some services important to public health, such as immunizations for children. If children were covered through ARKids First, they would get better access to lower-cost preventative care.

Why?

- **Children with access to health care do better overall.** These children are the future of our state. It's in all our best interest for them to grow up healthy.
- **The United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands share a decades-long military history.** The islands have been seen as key to our national security since World War II and are home to a U.S. Army installation. Our government detonated dozens of nuclear weapons in the islands, displacing many native Marshallese. This is one of the reasons for the Compact of Free Association, which allows families to live in the United States lawfully. The compact does not come with U.S. citizenship, but rather a right to lawfully work and live here.