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SUNUNU, GREGG: SUPPORT FOR

MICHELLE'S LAW LEGISLATION GROWS FURTHER

Nineteen national organizations now supporting federal "Michelle's Law"

WASHINGTON, DC – United States Senators John Sununu and Judd Gregg (R-NH) today (3/6) announced that five additional national organizations are supporting federal "Michelle's Law" legislation (S. 400), bringing the total number of supporting groups to 19. The bill, introduced in 2007 by Sununu, Gregg, and Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY), would provide the extension of existing health insurance coverage to college students for up to one year in the event of a medically necessary leave of absence.

New Hampshire adopted a similar law at the state level, known as "Michelle's Law," after the late Michelle Morse, a 20-year-old college student at Plymouth State University (New Hampshire), was forced to remain a full-time student despite being treated for advanced colon cancer. She died in 2005 soon after graduating from Plymouth State.

Senator Sununu stated, "March serves as National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and I can't think of a more fitting tribute to Michelle than the broadening support we are seeing for passage of a federal 'Michelle's Law.' Health, education, and insurance groups agree that full-time college students deserve continued coverage by federally regulated health plans if they are forced to leave school to handle a serious illness. This coverage allows ailing students to focus their energy where it should be - on recovering rather than being both a full-time student and a full-time patient."

Senator Gregg stated, "Throughout the course of her illness, Michelle Morse bravely fought to make things better for future college students who experience serious illness or injury causing them to leave school. The continuing support for this bipartisan bill is a tribute to Michelle's memory and recognition of her family's dedication and commitment to make sure families are able to focus on the care and recovery of their college age child, instead of worrying about how to pay the health care costs when insurance will no longer cover their care. The support of these national health organizations will help to highlight the importance of this much needed legislation."

On February 12, Sununu and Gregg announced that 14 national organizations including the National Health Council, the National Education Association, and

America's Health Insurance Plans are supporting the legislation. Since that time, five additional organizations have added their support:

- **National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship**

“We commend you for your leadership in addressing this gap in health insurance coverage for students, and your commitment to advancing the interests of cancer patients and their families.” – Ellen Stoval, President and CEO

- **The Catholic Health Association**

“Thank you for your leadership in sponsoring the bipartisan bill S. 400, “Michelle’s Law,” to make sure that college students can take a leave of absence to address serious medical problems without losing their health care coverage.” – St. Carol Keehan, DC, President & CEO.

- **American Nurses Association**

“We applaud Michelle’s law, as ANA has long been committed to access to quality health care for all. Michelle’s Law would ensure that Americans receive the life-saving medical treatment they need, as well as the time needed to undergo that treatment, without fear of losing health insurance coverage due to a leave of absence from postsecondary education.” – Rose Gonzalez, MPS, RN, Director of Government Affairs

- **American Medical Student Association/Foundation**

“With the cost of education rising, access to health care decreasing, and health disparities widening, this is a time when *all* students need to come together and start to enact real change. Your bill will provide that change for students during their greatest time of need – when they are too sick to study.” – Michael J. Ehlert, M.D., AMSA National President

- **Mental Health America**

“On behalf of Mental Health America (MHA) and our 320 state and local Mental Health America affiliates nationwide, I am writing to applaud your leadership in introducing S. 400, a bill to ensure that dependent students who take a leave of absence from a post-secondary

educational institution because of a health problem do not lose health coverage.” – David Shern, Ph.D., President and CEO

Michelle’s Law was passed at the state level in New Hampshire in June 2006 and applies to state-regulated insurance plans. New York enacted similar legislation in 1999. The Sununu-Gregg-Clinton bill covers plans regulated at the federal level by the Employee Retirement Security Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) and does not impact other state-regulated insurance plans.

The following specific provisions are included in the bi-partisan legislation:

- Maintains existing health coverage up to one year for full-time student "dependents" – age 18 or older who are enrolled in a post-secondary educational institution – whose leave has been certified by a physician;
- Should a student’s parents or caregiver switch coverage, a successor ERISA plan that covers dependent care would have to abide by a student’s approved leave of absence;
- Summer or semester breaks would not disqualify the medical leave.

Editor’s Note: [Click here](#) to see listing of other organizations supporting S. 400 or paste the following link into your browser:

<http://www.sununu.senate.gov/pressapp/record.cfm?id=292761>

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