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PRESS RELEASE

SUNUNU, GREGG LAUD SENATE PASSAGE OF FEDERAL MICHELLE'S LAW LEGISLATION

Bill to ensure college students have access to medical leave heads to President's desk

Contact: Barbara Riley
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WASHINGTON, DC – United States Senators John Sununu and Judd Gregg (R-NH) today (9/25) announced Senate passage of the federal version of Michelle's Law. This legislation would provide the extension of existing health insurance coverage to dependant college students for up to one year in the event of a medically necessary leave of absence. The bill, which was approved unanimously by the Senate Thursday, now heads to the President's desk to be signed into law.

Both Senators are long-time champions of the measure, whose namesake is the late Michelle Morse, a 20-year-old college student at Plymouth State University (New Hampshire). Due to laws in place at the time, Michelle found it necessary to remain a full-time student despite being treated for advanced colon cancer, because otherwise her parent's insurance would not cover her care. She died in 2005 from this illness after graduating from Plymouth State. The State of New Hampshire adopted a similar law at the state level in 2006.

Senator Sununu stated, "Passage of this legislation is a fitting tribute to Michelle's fight against cancer and her family's commitment to ensuring that full-time college students covered by federally regulated health plans receive the coverage they need to handle a serious illness. I have been proud to work with Michelle's mother AnnMarie, who deserves tremendous credit and our deep gratitude for her tireless efforts on behalf of her daughter. The strong bipartisan support for 'Michelle's Law' demonstrates a broad agreement among health, education, and insurance groups that ailing students should be able to focus on recovering."

Senator Gregg stated, "Throughout the course of her illness, Michelle Morse bravely fought

to make things better for college students who experience serious illness or injury causing them to leave school. The Senate's passage of this bipartisan bill is the next-to-last step before this legislation, which honors both Michelle's memory and her family's committed efforts on her behalf, becomes law. Because of the Morse's commitment, families will now be 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. I applaud Senator Sununu for his leadership on this bill which solves a problem that was brought to light in the Granite State with a common-sense solution that will benefit folks throughout our county."

AnnMarie Morse, stated "'Michelle's Law' would not be possible without the continued support of so many State legislators and the New Hampshire Washington delegation. My sincere and heartfelt thanks to Senators Sununu and Gregg and their staff for their continuous support, dedication and effort in getting 'Michelle's Law' passed. It was not an easy challenge and lots of hard work went on behind the scenes. Teamwork at its truest form. What began as a State law in New Hampshire has been passed as a state law in other states as well as a Federal law. 'Michelle's Law' may not change the outcome of the illness or injury to the student, however; it will make sure that another family will not have to follow our footsteps when it comes to taking a leave of absence for a seriously ill or injured full-time student."

Following passage, a number of national organizations praised the Senate action:

America's Health Insurance Plans:

"We commend Senators Sununu and Gregg for their bipartisan leadership and the passage of this important legislation," said Karen Ignagni, President and CEO of America's Health Insurance Plans. "Our community is strongly committed to ensuring continuity of care for college students who go on medical leave from school."

National Health Council:

"As an organization that promotes the health of all people and works to provide a united voice for people with chronic diseases and disabilities, the National Health Council thanks the United States Senate for passing Michelle's Law," said Myrl Weinberg, President of the National Health Council. "Financially dependent individuals seeking an education should not lose their health insurance just when they need it the most – they did not choose this battle, the battle chose them. Michelle Morse has now passed away, but through this legislation the lessons learned from her passing can be used to establish a valuable legacy by making a positive difference for future generations."

National Education Association:

"This vital legislation would expand access to health insurance for college students. It's an issue close to all NEA members, but particularly because Michelle's Law is named after the

tragic circumstances faced by Michelle Morse, the daughter of an NEA member, said Dennis Van Roekel, President of the National Education Association. “Michelle was forced to maintain a full college course load while undergoing debilitating cancer treatment, or risk losing her health insurance. Students like Michelle, who are working hard to improve their lives, shouldn’t have to choose between their studies and their health. We applaud lawmakers for supporting legislation to ensure that seriously ill students can take the time necessary to undergo treatment and recovery before returning to their academic studies.”

National Patient Advocate Foundation:

“We know well the tragedy imposed on all patients—in particular young adults and their families—when their insurer threatens loss of healthcare coverage,” said Nancy Davenport-Ennis, Founder and CEO of the National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF). “We offer our complete support to Congress and applaud the passage of this legislation recognizing the plight of many of today’s students diagnosed with a life-threatening illness that interrupts their academic pursuits. Every young adult deserves to succeed, despite the challenges they face due to illness.”

BACKGROUND: In addition to the organizations noted above, 18 other national health, education, and insurance organizations support the initiative. The following provisions are included in the bill:

- Maintains health insurance coverage for up to one year for dependent students enrolled at post-secondary educational institutions suffering from a serious illness or injury that requires a leave of absence;
- Provides that should the student’s health plan change after the first day of a leave of absence, but before the coverage would otherwise terminate, the student would remain eligible for coverage as a dependent student under the new plan;
- Applies to health plans governed by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, the Internal Revenue Code, and the Public Health Safety Act; and
- Becomes effective one year from enactment.