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SUNUNU, GREGG ANNOUNCE SIGNING OF “MICHELLE’S LAW”

Named for New Hampshire’s Michelle Morse, new law ensures that college students have access to medical leave

WASHINGTON, DC – United States Senators John Sununu and Judd Gregg hailed the signing of “Michelle’s Law” by President Bush today (10/9). The new federal law, which both Senators championed, increases access to medical coverage for college students by providing for 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 law is named for the late Michelle Morse, a 20-year-old college student at Plymouth State University (New Hampshire) who died in 2005. Michelle had remained a full-time student while being treated for advanced colon cancer because, due to existing law at the time, her parents’ insurance would not otherwise cover her care. Her case prompted the State of New Hampshire to adopt a similar law in 2006.

Senators Sununu and Gregg stated, “Michelle’s Law allows full-time college students covered by federally regulated health plans to keep their coverage during a serious illness. Michelle’s mother, AnnMarie, deserves tremendous credit for her tireless efforts to ensure that other families can now focus on the care and recovery of their college age child, instead of worrying about maintaining their health insurance. Because of the commitment and hard work of the Morse family and their supporters, Michelle’s Law won bipartisan support in Congress and the endorsement of national health, education, and insurance groups. The President’s signature on this legislation today is a fitting tribute to Michelle’s memory and her brave fight against cancer.”

AnnMarie Morse stated, “I am so honored that, with the stroke of his pen, President Bush ensured that Michelle's Law is federal law. This is a great day for full-time college students who may become seriously ill or injured. Now, if a full-time, seriously ill or injured college student finds he or she must take a leave of absence from college, the student can do so without the fear of losing health insurance coverage.

“On a personal note, it was a bittersweet day for me. Although Michelle was not able to take a leave of absence while battling her cancer, she wanted me to continue fighting for Michelle's Law. She did not want any other college student to face the choice she had to make which was: stay in school and maintain her insurance, or take a leave of absence and lose it. This law began as a story about Michelle and our family, but it is not for our family, it is for other families that may have a college student who becomes seriously ill or injured.

“What a wonderful example of how Congress can work together to get a law passed. This law would not be possible without the support and determination of the cosponsors: Senators John Sununu, Judd Gregg, and Hillary Clinton, and Congressmen Paul Hodes and Michael Castle of Delaware.”

BACKGROUND: Organizations including America’s Health Insurance Plans, the National Health Council, the National Education Association, and the National Patient Advocate Foundation supported the initiative. The following provisions are included in the law:

- 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.