

KidsCare supporters urge governor to act



Courtesy of Rabbi John Linder

KidsCare supporters

From left, Deacon Jayne Baker of Ascension Lutheran Church; Dr. Delphis Richardson, president of the Arizona chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; Rabbi John Linder; and Dana Wolfe Naimark, president and CEO of Children's Action Alliance, attend the April 11 rally at the State Capitol to urge Gov. Ducey to lift a freeze on funding for the KidsCare program.

Posted: Wednesday, April 13, 2016 10:00 am

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About 75 people turned out April 11 at the State Capitol to urge Gov. Doug Ducey to lift a state freeze on Children's Health Insurance Program spending, since a bill to lift the freeze has been blocked by state Sen. Andy Biggs, president of the Arizona Senate.

"Arizona is the only state that has a freeze on KidsCare," said Rabbi John Linder of Temple Solel, referring to the health insurance program by its popular name. Linder was one of eight rabbis from the

Valley and Tucson who signed an open letter from the Arizona Interfaith Network to the governor. In all, 81 clerics signed the letter.

(Others who signed were Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz of Valley Beit Midrash, Rabbi Elana Kanter of The New Shul and The Women's Jewish Learning Center, Rabbi Mari Chernow of Temple Chai and Rabbi Jeremy Schneider of Temple Kol Ami. From Tucson, Rabbi Samuel Cohon of Temple Emanu-El, Rabbi Robert Eisen of Congregation Anshei Israel and Rabbi Thomas Louchheim of Congregation Or Chadash also signed.)

"The point that I would make if I had an opportunity to speak directly with the governor is that I don't think that Gov. Ducey wants to distinguish Arizona as the only state in the country to not fund low-income kids that would otherwise fall through the cracks," Linder told Jewish News after the morning rally on April 11. He said that lifting the freeze would benefit about 30,000 children of the working poor whose income makes them ineligible for AHCCCS, the state's version of Medicaid (federal health insurance for the indigent) but who make too little to afford Affordable Care Act plans.

The state froze the funding in 2010 while dealing with a budget crunch. HB 2309 was introduced in January to lift the spending freeze. According to published reports, about 63,000 children in the state had been served by the insurance before the freeze but now only about 1,000 children are served.

The bill had a bipartisan group of sponsors and the House passed it 47-12 on March 2 and sent it to the Senate, where Biggs has kept it from coming to the floor.

An Associated Press report said that Biggs blocked the bill "because he's opposed to the Affordable Care Act and is worried the federal government will cut payments and force Arizona to pick up more of the tab."

The legislation, however, contains language that would rescind the program in Arizona should the federal government end its funding.

Proponents of KidsCare maintain that not lifting the freeze costs the health care system money as these uninsured, working poor families (who earn from 139 to 200 percent of the federal poverty level) turn to emergency rooms to provide their children's health care.

The letter from Arizona Interfaith Network contains several bullet points for the governor's consideration, including "Research from Georgetown University cited in local newspapers has found that Arizona has the highest rate of uninsured children in the income bracket mentioned above" and "Children who do not have access to regular health care do poorly in school," which adds another level of societal costs in the future.