

Castle Introduces Bill to Maintain Health Insurance for Students Who Become Ill -- June 27, 2007

Washington D.C. -- Representative Mike Castle, a senior Member of the House Education and Labor Committee, introduced, along with Rep. Paul Hodes (D-NH), H.R. 2851, Michelle's Law. This legislation would amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) to allow seriously ill college students to take up to one year of medical leave without losing their health insurance. Currently, students between the ages of 19 and 24 are only eligible to keep their parents' health insurance if they maintain the status of a full-time student; however, if the student becomes severely ill, they must choose to continue with a full-time course load or lose their healthcare eligibility and purchase an expensive COBRA plan. Michelle's Law expands these options by allowing students to maintain their parents' health insurance for up to one year for a physician-certified severe medical condition. Rep. Castle believes this legislation is critical in helping college students take care of their health while continuing to pursue a degree.

"Every year, numerous college students are faced with a serious illness and have to choose between their health and their health insurance. I believe this bill provides the necessary provisions to allow them to postpone their education for one year in order to prioritize their health. This legislation will benefit numerous college students across the country and ease the burden of illness so serious that it requires medical leave," Castle said.

Michelle's Law is inspired by Michelle Morse. Michelle was a full time college student from New Hampshire who was diagnosed with colon cancer. Her doctors advised her to cut back on her course load while undergoing chemotherapy, but she could not because she would lose her family's health insurance when she needed it most. Michelle died tragically, as she struggled to regain her health while going to school full-time.

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