

Testimony of Job Timothy Bedford

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United States Senate Committee on Finance

HEARING: "The Future of CHIP: Improving the Health of America's Children"

Good morning. I am honored to be here in the presence of the Senate Committee on Finance and distinguished others.

I am Job Timothy Bedford, a 13-year-old 8th grader at The Boys' Latin School of Maryland in Baltimore, and the oldest of five children. Thank you for allowing me to speak today on behalf of many other kids with chronic illnesses like myself.

At the age of five I was diagnosed with asthma. Asthma is a chronic illness that inhibits your breathing from time to time. Nearly 9 million American children have this disease. Asthma can make you feel like your throat has shrunk and like you are breathing through a straw. When I have an asthma attack, I start wheezing very hard because of the lack of air going into my lungs. When this happens, I try to find my inhaler. An inhaler is a small device that releases a drug that relaxes the muscles in your air ways. This usually stops my wheezing and any other asthmatic symptoms I may have at the time.

Having good health insurance gives me the means of obtaining inhalers and all other necessary medical treatments I need. I really like the security of knowing I always have an inhaler when and where I need it. We keep one at home, and one at the nurse's office at school, and I always carry one with me wherever I go. It makes me feel safer. Asthma attacks are kind of scary. They are very unpredictable and there is always the worry in the back of my mind that I just might die. When I was younger, I used to not like driving on highways, because they seemed endless and too difficult to get off of if I suddenly needed to go to a hospital. I would always ask my mom, "how long are we going to be on this road," and "do you know where a hospital is around here?" Having asthma makes you feel uneasy.

There are certain circumstances that can trigger asthma attacks. They are different for different kids. One of my main triggers, and the one that makes me most fearful is my allergy to shellfish. If I eat shellfish, like shrimp or crabs, the reaction to my body is very extreme. I get hives and swelling and many other symptoms, but the worst is that it triggers an intense asthma attack. While I do not ever knowingly eat shellfish, and try to be very careful checking to make sure that wherever I eat there is no shellfish present, sometimes it is unavoidable. Sometimes, people who cook food do what I call "cross-pollination," meaning they may cook shellfish in one pot and something harmless like vegetables in another, but they use the same spoon to stir both dishes. For kids with food allergies, this can be very dangerous, and for me can trigger an asthma attack. My family avoids buffet-style restaurants, especially ones that highlight seafood dishes, because when other customers there eat shellfish, and then go and pick up the salad tongs or other serving utensils for dishes I *can* eat, the shellfish residue from their hands gets on the

serving utensils or even on bathroom doorknobs, and causes me to have an allergic reaction, which leads to an asthma attack and having to use my inhaler. There are many things to be constantly aware of for kids like me that have lingering medical conditions.

Having the excellent health care we have through M-CHIP means that I always have my inhalers and other asthma stabilizer drugs, like Flovent, available and I also have medicines like the Epi-pen for allergic reactions. The Epi-pen can save my life if I have a severe allergic reaction, because the epinephrine injection can stop the effects of the shellfish on my body and stabilize me until I can get more advanced medical care. I feel very secure knowing that I always have an Epi-pen with me in my bookbag, one at home, and one in the nurse's office at school.

However all of these medicines I need are expensive. I researched with my parents and learned that a *single* Epi-pen without the medical insurance we have through M-CHIP would cost \$76.18 *each*. The asthma inhalers would cost \$32.99 *each*, the Flovent would cost \$102.89 *each*. And, additional medicines that I take daily would cost \$203.82 *per month* without health insurance. I wanted to give these exact figures to show how expensive prescriptions can be. And these are just for me. My 4-yr-old brother also has asthma and food allergies, and so his prescriptions cost about the same amount as mine.

I feel a little sad about having asthma because it sometimes limits the things I can do. For example, some sports require a lot of endurance, and when you have asthma, it can limit the amount of stamina you need to keep playing. Some warnings like the ones on some roller coasters say kids that have asthma shouldn't go on them. But these are small worries, compared to being able to have the medical care I need.

Having good health insurance through the Children's Health Insurance Program means that necessary medicines and anything we may need medically are always available to me and my siblings. There are no words to describe how safe that makes me feel. I wish everyone had the ability to get the medicine they needed to make their lives easier.

Thank you.