

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Victory For Mapp, Federal Gov't Will Pay 91 Percent Of Healthcare Costs For Eligible Children Ages 1-19

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp announced at a Government House press conference here on Wednesday that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has accepted his administration's petition to transfer coverage of eligible children from the Medical Assistance Program (M.A.P.) to the Children's Health Insurance Program (C.H.I.P.). Under C.H.I.P., the federal government will pay 91.5 percent of healthcare costs for eligible children from birth through 19 years, with the local government match being 8.5 percent.

"That means that the money set aside for the M.A.P. program for the local government can be used now for adults only, because the children will no longer be a part of the local

M.A.P. program," the governor said.

The announcement represents a major win for Mr. Mapp, who said his administration lobbied the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (C.M.S.) for the change. The news was delivered to the governor by the regional administrator of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services last week. Mr. Mapp also received written confirmation of the change.

In explaining how the change affects the government, Mr. Mapp said, "In layman's term, when the children's health insurance remains in the local program, it is subject to the government's match of 45 percent, and subject to the cap of the available monies for that year for medical insurance for adults and children."

To qualify, however, a household's earnings per person must be at or below \$11,880 annually. Simply put, individuals in eligible households cannot earn more than \$11,880. Anything above that amount -- per person -- would mean disqualification.

This potentially diminishes the impact of Mr. Mapp's announcement, as the territory's minimum wage, currently at \$9.50, sees a five-day, 8-hour employee of any business grossing \$18,240 annually. Even after taxes and other deductions, a minimum wage employee's income comes above the \$11,880 C.H.I.P. cap. However, [during a press conference in May](#), Mr. Mapp said the U.S. Department of Human Services had approved his administration's request to increase the federal poverty level for the territory from \$6,500 to \$11,800, which Mr. Mapp said made 19,000 more members of Virgin Islands households eligible for federally subsidized healthcare programs. Mr. Mapp expects the latest change to save the government a substantial amount of money.

"The Virgin Islands Government will have a concomitant reduction in cost because we subsidize the health insurance plan for families at 65 percent of the cost," he said.

According to the governor, the Department of Education, whose officials were at the press conference discussing school reopening preparedness initiatives, will play a key role in helping the local government identify children who will be eligible, beginning October 1, for the federally subsidized healthcare coverage under C.H.I.P.

The governor said insurance coverage for children now on the family plans of income eligible government employees will be transferred to C.H.I.P. under the new arrangement. The school system will begin determining which students are members of qualifying families, as part of the overall strategy to reduce the fiscal burden of healthcare on local resources by making maximum use of federal programs, according to the governor.

"By increasing our use of federal dollars to ease the burden of healthcare costs on our people, our hospitals, and our government, we are pursuing our long-term strategy to improve our quality of life, and eventually to eliminate our persistent fiscal imbalance," Mr. Mapp said.

Appearing with the governor at the news conference was D.O.E. Commissioner Sharon McCollum, who assured parents, students and teachers that the territory's public schools will be prepared for the next school year beginning September 5, 2017. Ms. McCollum acknowledged that some physical repairs will be ongoing, but that the basic

maintenance and repairs will have been completed by then.

Governor Mapp and Lt. Governor Osbert Potter are scheduled to tour school properties territory-wide on August 28.

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