



## Christie Pressured To Halt Funding Cuts To N.J. FamilyCare And Charity Health Care

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BY TOM HESTER SR., NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM

Three legislators and activists from the New Jersey for [Health Care](#) Coalition joined at the Statehouse Monday to call on Gov. Chris Christie to change his position on cutting or freezing aid to the state FamilyCare and charity care programs.

Speaking in opposition to the budget-cutting moves were Sen. Joseph Vitale (D-Middlesex), vice chairman of the Senate Health, Human Services & Senior Citizens Committee, Sen. Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen), the panel's chairwoman, and Assemblyman Albert Coutinho (D-Essex), a member of the Assembly Budget and Human Services committees.

As part of an effort to eliminate a \$1.1 billion budget deficit facing the 2009-10 state budget, Christie cut or froze aid for the two programs. He has no plans to change the action.

The legislators and advocates argue the cuts froze FamilyCare enrollment for [low income](#) adults as of March 1, and dump from the program legal immigrants who have lived in the country less than five years starting April 1. They charge the cuts would result in approximately 20,500 adults either losing or being denied coverage during the current fiscal year and an 69,000 losing or being denied coverage in the 2010-11 budget, if the cuts are continued. They said research has demonstrated that when parents are denied access to the program many children are not enrolled.

"At a time when New Jerseyans are struggling to make ends meet, drastic cuts to our most valuable health care safety net programs simply do not make sense," Vitale said "Not only will these cuts put uninsured New Jerseyans at risk, but they also stand to deny our State millions of dollars in federal matching funds. We cannot balance the budget on the backs of the uninsured, and I urge Governor Christie to explore alternatives to the deep cuts he's put forward in programs that literally mean the difference between life and death for New Jersey residents in greatest need."

Weinberg said, "The cuts in Charity Care are particularly disturbing, especially when you consider the [rash](#) of hospital closings around the state in recent years. Charity Care funding is matched dollar for dollar by the Federal government; it's irresponsible to leave his money on the table while New Jersey is suffering. Governor Christie even cut the \$3 million that would be left after all the payments were made, not even allowing hospitals to literally scrape the bottom of the barrel."

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Advocates distributed a new analysis prepared by Ray Castor, [New Jersey Policy](#) Perspective senior

than has been previously reported," Castro said. "In addition to 11,700 legal immigrant parents who would be terminated from the program, many other low-income parents who are United States citizens will be denied [health coverage](#) if their annual family income exceeds \$24,000 a-year for a family of three. Given that the federal government has awarded New Jersey over \$2 billion in additional Medicaid funds to help avoid cutbacks - and another one half billion is expected to be approved soon for New Jersey by Congress - denying help to struggling parents in the middle of a recession is both unnecessary and unconscionable."

"These poorly thought-out cuts will do nothing but add more people to the Charity Care rolls and cut much needed federal support for our hospitals. The combined effect of these cuts will place additional pressure on our already distressed hospital system," Coutinho said.

Also criticizing the cuts were Eve Weissman, **New Jersey Citizen Action** health care coordinator; **Shai Goldstein, New Jersey Immigration Policy Network** director, and Anita Clavering, Mighty Middlesex Advocates facilitator.

"This is not a policy, it's a discriminatory punishment based on status," Goldstein said. "It won't save taxpayers a dime but will force 12,000 of our friends and neighbors, who work hard, pay taxes and play by the rules out of the Dr. Office and into the emergency room. It simply defies logic."

NJ FamilyCare provides quality, affordable health insurance for income eligible children and parents. NJ FamilyCare currently provides coverage for over 580,000 children and over 200,000 adults.

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