



Health-care Legislation Supports Life and Expands Access

JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri recently enacted legislation supporting the culture of life and improving health-care opportunities in our state. Gov. Blunt this month signed into law legislation creating tax credit programs to benefit pregnancy and child-advocacy centers and expanding access to health care for small-business employees.

House Bill 1485 authorizes an income tax credit for 50 percent of contributions to qualified pregnancy resource centers. These centers work with women who are facing a crisis or an unplanned pregnancy and help them make the right choice — the choice of life.

Pregnancy resource centers provide assistance and support to women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy. Taxpayers can claim up to \$50,000 per year, with a \$2 million statewide cap per year. The tax credit program, highlighting the many merits of pregnancy resource centers, was a top priority for lawmakers and administration officials in 2006. With this new program, Missouri is continuing efforts to establish a culture of life to benefit all citizens.

A second part of the bill also makes unused adoption tax credits available to entities that work directly with Missouri children in crisis. Child advocacy centers, crisis-care centers and entities that receive funding from the Court Appointed Special Advocate Fund will now have access to credits that would otherwise go unused. Last year this would have totaled \$1.4 million in tax credits. The money will come from a \$2 million fund that provides tax credits to people who adopt Missouri foster children. Only about \$550,000 of the \$2 million was claimed during the 2005 fiscal year.

HB 1827 increases access to affordable health care for employees of small businesses. The new law will make it easier for Missouri's small employers to join with larger employers to form association health plans. Association health plans allow separate employers to join together to purchase group health care as a single employer.

The bill expands eligibility for association health plans by decreasing the requirement for the number of members in an association from 100 to 50. The legislation also provides an exemption to the Small Employer Health Insurance Availability Act by waiving the requirement that rates for similar small businesses be within 20 percent of one another. Waiving the requirement builds the foundation for more insurers to write association health-plan policies. The plans offer cost savings for employers and lower rates through the ability to spread risk and administrative costs over a larger pool of employees.

These new laws support the pro-life values of Missourians while ensuring better access to health care for small-business employees.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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