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**Summit County Councilmember Paula Prentice
hosts meeting regarding health care coverage for children**

Summit County Councilmember Paula Prentice brought together around 30 community leaders Dec. 10 at the Job Center, 1040 Tallmadge Ave., in Akron to explore ways the county can help get eligible children signed up for healthcare coverage.

Prentice, who represents District 8, explained that data shows around 7,200 children in the county are eligible for expanded Medicaid coverage, but are not enrolled. Data also shows, Prentice said, that around 5,500 children are already enrolled in the program.

An educator for more than 30 years, Prentice said she holds a special place in her heart for helping children and health care is one area where she sees a significant difference can be made.

“I have seen many children that have health problems, both mental and physical, that are not diagnosed until they register for school at age five,” Prentice explained. “Children are not entering school ‘ready to learn’ but are in need of remediation of these problems, this takes time away from the learning process”

At the meeting, Prentice highlighted aspects of the State Children’s Healthcare Insurance Program (SCHIP), which is a federal Medicaid expansion program that goes by different names in different states – in Ohio, the program is called Healthy Start. The Healthy Start program covers children ages 19 and under who are from families with income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

“Because of all that is going on in the United States at this time, we are undergoing changes in our culture. The need for SCHIP is not just for the ‘poor’ anymore, but for a wider population,” Prentice said. “The working people are in need of support. It is important we project SCHIP as an insurance program for children not coverage for the poor.”

Prentice said she wanted to bring together the community coalition so leaders could discuss what could be done to help get more children enrolled utilizing their individual expertise and experiences. The ultimate goal, she said, is to get every eligible child in the county enrolled with Healthy Start.

Some of the initial goals noted at the meeting include: 1) Providing a more comprehensive way to expose potentially-eligible parents and guardians to the enrollment application; 2) When people apply for Healthy Start, they should also be made aware that they qualify for other programs such as home weatherization and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); and 3) Marketing the availability of the program throughout the county through various media outlets.

The group will meet again in January and focus on more specific approaches to accomplishing the overall goal.

For more information, please contact the Summit County Council Office at (330) 643-2725.

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