



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, July 13, 2018

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Four state legislators named Champions for Children

Saldaña, Santos, Billig, Riccelli recognized for increasing access to health care

Friday, July 13, 2018—Four state lawmakers have been honored for their outstanding service on behalf of children in the 2018 state legislative session.

Each of the lawmakers partnered with the Children's Alliance to ensure the passage of Senate Bill 5683, which advances family and community health by making affordable full-family coverage possible for thousands of Asian and Pacific Islander Washingtonians.

The bill passed 46-2 in the Senate, with one senator excused, and 57-41 in the House. Governor Jay Inslee [signed the bill into law](#) on March 22.

“Children do better when their parents and family members are healthy. Legislators who earned the Champion for Children award worked hard to bring health care to thousands of Washingtonians who had been shut out of affordable coverage options,” said Jon Gould, deputy director of Children's Alliance, which along with allies, community members and advocates across the state also pushed for the bill's passage. “These legislators distinguished themselves by joining with Children's Alliance to make health justice a priority in Washington.”

The bill, passed on a broad bipartisan basis, covers out-of-pocket costs and pays the monthly premiums of income-eligible Washington adults from three nations—the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau—when they purchase qualified health plans on the Washington Health Benefit Exchange.

An estimated 6,000-8,000 citizens of these three countries reside in Washington, with significant numbers in or near Spokane, Everett, Auburn, Federal Way, Vancouver, and the Tri-Cities. They are entitled under the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) between their homelands and the U.S. government to travel to and apply for admission to the United States as non-immigrants without visas. They are eligible to work, and they serve in every branch of the U.S. armed forces. A larger per capita number of COFA migrants from the Federated States of Micronesia enlist in the U.S. military than from any U.S. state.

Yet since the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, adults living in the United States from COFA nations have not been eligible for Medicaid. Senate Bill 5683 rights this historic wrong by covering adult residents who would be income-eligible for Medicaid; thanks to the passage of the Cover All Kids law in 2007, which created Apple Health for Kids, Washington children from these three countries are already covered.

The 2018 Champions for Children are:

Senator Rebecca Saldaña (D-Seattle), was the prime sponsor of SB 5683 and led the Senate Members of Color Caucus and the Senate at large to ensure that adults' out-of-pocket costs would be covered.

Senator Andy Billig (D-Spokane), for amending the legislation to include culturally and linguistically accessible outreach to affected communities. He also ensured that a members of a newly created advisory board to ensure successful implementation of the law would be reimbursed for their travel to meetings.

Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos (D-Seattle), who first alerted her fellow legislators to the need for Senate Bill 5683 and led her colleagues in a multi-year effort to secure its passage.

Representative Marcus Riccelli (D-Spokane), for leading his caucus to ensure that the final bill helped families pay for health care by covering out-of-pocket costs.

“It was an honor to work alongside these lawmakers who listened to us and partnered with us,” said Jiji Jally, who led fellow citizens of the Marshall Islands in meeting with lawmakers about their family members’ struggles to find affordable health care. “I was proud to advocate for the health of my Marshallese community. Today we are hopeful that our families and elders will have the health care that everyone needs, and that so many in our community have been denied.”

Coverage in the new [COFA Islander Health Care Program](#) will begin on January 1, 2019. Outreach begins on September 1.

The Children’s Alliance (www.childrensalliance.org) works to effect positive change in public policies, budgets and programs at the state and federal levels.

