



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley
Family Opportunity Act of 2003, S. 622
Finance Committee Mark-up
Wednesday, September 10, 2003

I'm very pleased that the committee is holding a mark-up today on a bill I introduced over four years ago. I want to take just a few minutes to talk about the history of the *Family Opportunity Act*. For several years, Senator Kennedy and I have been promoting our bill called the *Family Opportunity Act* to help children with disabilities and their families. The bill became popular in short order. I attribute much its popularity to the hard work of families and child advocacy groups, many of whom are here today. Dozens of organizations have officially endorsed the *Family Opportunity Act*. More impressive than the list of organizations are the hundreds and hundreds of letters and calls sent by individual families to Congress. I have a stack of letters here, but this is just a small sample of the letters that families have written.

The combined efforts of individuals and advocacy organizations representing families with children with special health care needs have helped to persuade 62 senators to join as co-sponsors of this legislation. That number is extraordinary. I can't remember many pieces of legislation that attracted so much strong and enduring support. There is a budget reserve fund of \$7.5 billion. I wholeheartedly thank Senator Nickles for his willingness to include the *Family Opportunity Act* in the 2003 congressional budget.

It feels great to work on legislation that has such strong support from working families. Our bill is pro-family because it keeps families together. Our bill is pro-work because it lets parents work without losing their children's health care. And our bill is pro-taxpayer because it lets parents earn money and help pay their own way for Medicaid coverage for their child. Why is this legislation so necessary? As a parent, your main objective in life is to provide for your child to the best of your ability. Our federal government takes this goal and turns it upside down for the parents of children with special health care needs. The government forces these parents to choose between family income and their children's health care. That's a terrible choice. Families have to remain in poverty just to keep Medicaid. Obviously this affects entire families, not just the child with health care needs.

I became aware of the obstacles facing families from an Iowa family, the Arnolds. The Arnolds tell how their family was prevented from becoming self-sufficient and forced to stay impoverished so that Adam Arnold could maintain his Medicaid coverage. Without Medicaid, Adam – a young boy with multiple medical needs – would not have been able to get the health care

services he needed. Melissa Arnold, Adam's mother, has been forced to turn down promotions and raises in order to keep her earnings low enough for her son to qualify for Medicaid. What's more, her oldest son Daniel was also prevented from work. Like so many teen-agers, Daniel was eager to find a part-time job. But because any earnings Daniel would have made from a job would have counted against his family income and jeopardized Adam's Medicaid status, Daniel was not able to work. No hard-working family should have to choose between work and caring for a child. Why does the *Family Opportunity Act* choose Medicaid as the means of coverage? Because Medicaid services are so critical to the well-being of children with multiple medical needs.

Medicaid covers a lot of services that these children need on a regular basis, such as physical therapy and medical equipment. Private health plans often are much more limited in what they cover. Many parents can't afford needed services or multiple co-payments out of pocket. Our bill creates a state option to allow working parents who have a child with a disability to keep working and to still have access to Medicaid for their child. Parents would pay for Medicaid coverage on a sliding scale. No one would have to become impoverished or stay impoverished to secure Medicaid for a child. The *Family Opportunity Act* recognizes a universal truth. Everybody wants to use their talents to the fullest potential, and every parent wants to provide as much as possible for his or her children. The government shouldn't get in the way.