

Medicaid form change causes brief stir

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Body

The state's recent **change** in its **Medicaid** application **form** alarmed some immigrant advocates, who feared the revision could block eligible children from receiving aid.

After they complained, the state agency said the new **form** was a "mistake" and reverted back to the previous application.

"It placed a barrier to children entitled to **Medicaid**," said Vicky Kimbrell, a project director with Georgia Legal Services Program, which helps immigrants obtain government assistance. **Medicaid** is the massive joint state-federal program that provides health insurance to the needy.

The controversy with the **form** centered on the legal right of children born in this country to obtain government assistance, even if their parents are illegal immigrants.

Essentially, the new **form** required the parent applying for their child's **Medicaid** to sign a statement asserting the parent had legal immigration status. Immigrant advocates and social workers said they were concerned that illegal immigrant parents would have to either lie and subject themselves to possible criminal charges, or simply not apply for the benefits for their children.

It remains unclear whether any children were affected, advocates said. The **form** was placed on the Web page of the state Department of Community Health on May 1 and removed May 26. The **form** was not printed and distributed in mass by the agency, or translated into another language.

Advocates praised the state for quickly addressing the problem.

A DCH spokeswoman said that the **form** was misleading and was not intended to dissuade illegal immigrant parents from applying for benefits for their children who are U.S. citizens.

"It was an honest mistake," said DCH spokeswoman Lisa Marie Shekell. She said state officials replaced the **form** the day after they were notified by the advocates.

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She said the error was made because the state tried to streamline the application. The state has returned to its prior application, which allows the parent to declare the immigration status of the child and does not ask the parent's status.

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