

FAMILY VOICES

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KATIE BECKETT TURNS 18 ON MARCH 9: IS HER LEGACY IN JEOPARDY?

What would happen to Katie Beckett if she were born today?

Family Voices, a national network of families who have children with special health care needs, will honor Katie Beckett and her mother Julie Beckett during the 3rd Annual Family Voices Coordinator Training Conference. Katie will blow out the candles on her birthday cake at a reception to be held on March 11, 1996, from 5:00 pm- 7:00 pm at the Doubletree Park Terrace Hotel, at 16th and Rhode Island, NW, Washington, DC.

Eighteen years ago, on March 9, 1978, Katie Beckett was born to Julie and Mark Beckett. Today, Katie is an honor student at Regis High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She will graduate in June, then head on to Drake University. Not a very unusual story. However, Katie Beckett's story is more complicated than that. Indeed, she is living proof of what bipartisan government support for children can achieve.

Five months after Katie Beckett was born, she was hospitalized after contracting viral encephalitis and suffering complications. Katie was placed in the pediatric intensive care unit at St. Luke's Hospital, where she lived for the next three years. For almost two years, Katie's parents' health insurance policy paid for her hospital care, until its \$1 million lifetime cap was reached. After her parents' health insurance ran out, Medicaid stepped in to pay for Katie's hospital care. Katie reached the age of three and was healthy enough to be discharged from the hospital. However, Medicaid rules would not pay for her health care at home. At that point, Julie Beckett contacted her Congressman, Tom Tauke, a Republican, to see how Medicaid regulations might be changed. Congressman Tauke enlisted the aid of then-Vice-President George Bush. Soon, President Reagan mentioned Katie Beckett's situation in a press conference to illustrate the rigidity of Medicaid rules.

— More —

And by fall of 1982, Congressman Tauke and Congressman Henry Waxman, a Democrat, had jointly sponsored bipartisan legislation providing exceptions to Medicaid rules --- now called Medicaid Waivers --- that allowed Katie Beckett, and thousands of other children who were also living in hospitals and institutions, to come home to their families.

Today, more than 500,000 people who have chronic illnesses or disabilities are living at home, cared for by their families, their health costs paid through Medicaid Waivers that Katie's mother, Julie, helped to develop in almost every state. Private insurance now also provides similar exceptions.

Despite some lingering health problems, Katie Beckett is a typical high school senior, working part-time, excited about going to college, ready to begin to fulfill her lifetime dream of a career in journalism. As Katie enters adulthood, she leaves behind a legacy for thousands of other children. Her successful childhood illustrates what a caring government can achieve when policymakers understand their responsibility to children who need their help. That's why Katie and her mother wonder what would happen to Katie if she were born today.

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