

# New US law helps ill students keep health coverage

October 9 2009, By HOLLY RAMER , Associated Press Writer

---



Standing behind a picture of her daughter Michelle, AnnMarie Morse talks about Michelle's Law with U.S. Rep. Paul Hodes, D-N.H., left, and Plymouth University President Sara Jayne Steen in Concord , N.H., Friday, Oct. 9, 2009. The new law takes effect Friday across the country named after Michelle Morse who attended college full-time in order to keep her insurance before she died of colon cancer in 2005. (AP Photo/Jim Cole)

(AP) -- A federal law inspired by a New Hampshire woman's courage and enacted through her mother's determination took effect Friday, sparing seriously ill or injured college students from having to choose between taking time off and keeping their health insurance.

"Michelle's Law" allows college students to take up to a year off school for medical reasons and remain on their family's [health insurance](#) plan. It is named for Michelle Morse, who died of colon cancer at age 22 in

2005, six months after graduating from Plymouth State University.

Against her doctor's advice, the aspiring teacher maintained a full course load while undergoing [chemotherapy](#) because she otherwise would have been dropped from her parents' health insurance plan.

After her daughter's death, AnnMarie Morse made it her life's mission to ensure other families would not face the same choice. When someone from the state insurance department told her, "If you don't like the law, change it," that's exactly what she did.

The New Hampshire Legislature enacted its version of Michelle's Law in 2006. Morse then turned her focus to Congress, which passed the federal version last year.

"It's a very bittersweet day," Morse said at a news conference Friday, her voice trembling. "I wish I could turn back time and have the family my husband and I were given: one daughter, one son."

But she said she will continue to fight for health care reform. She was in Washington just a few weeks ago, telling members of Congress to "put patients before politics."

"Michelle's legacy will live on," she said.

Morse was joined by Rep. Paul Hodes, D-N.H., who sponsored the House version of the bill. Sen. Judd Gregg and former Sen. John Sununu, both R-N.H., led the efforts in the Senate.

Hodes estimated that the law could apply to thousands of [college students](#) nationwide.

"The message of Michelle's Law is that change is hard, but change is

possible," he said. "Health care reform is more than words, it affects people."

In a journal the Morse family shared with The Associated Press in 2006, Michelle Morse described her longing to have a family of her own, celebrate many Christmases and outlive her parents.

"I'm scared for my mom and dad," she wrote in December 2003, just after she was diagnosed. "I want to make this easier on them."

Sara Jayne Steen, president of Plymouth State University, said no one can spare families the pain of losing a child, but Michelle's Law will at least eliminate the tough choice between treatment and education.

"Can one person make a difference? The answer, profoundly and in front of us, is yes," she said.

*©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.*

Citation: New US law helps ill students keep health coverage (2009, October 9) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-10-law-ill-students-health-coverage.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--