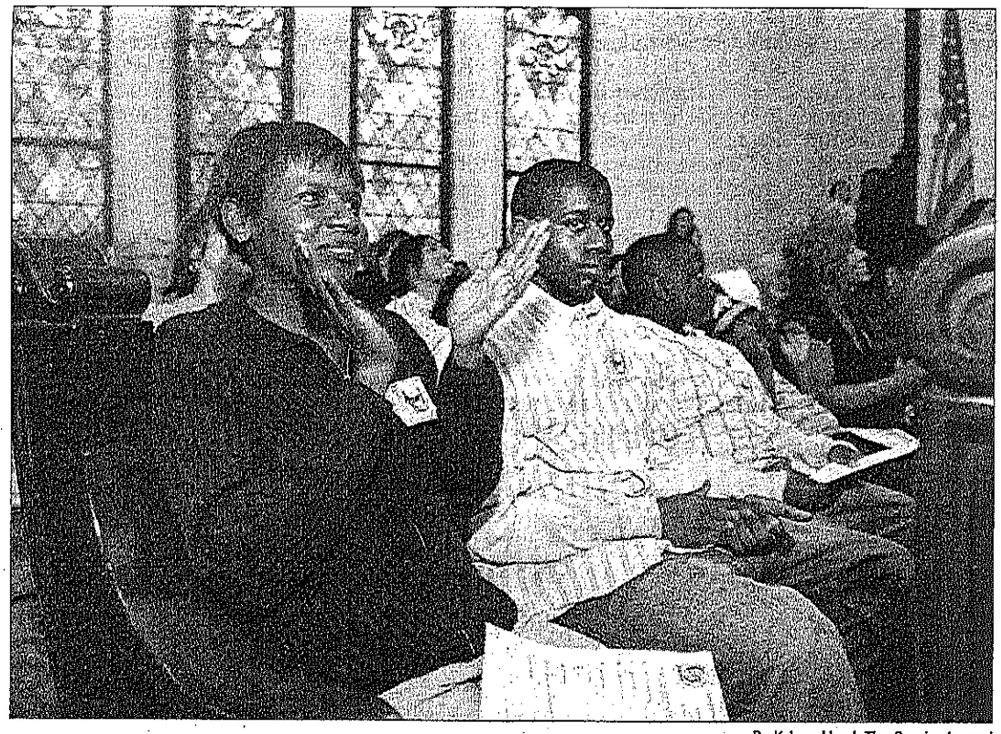

By Kylene Lloyd, The Courier-Journal

LaTonya Cain, left, applauded some of the speakers at CLOUT's meeting. Three of her children, Jordan Cain, from left, Edward Smith and JaTonya Cain, also attended. For a photo gallery, go to www.courier-journal.com.

4-1-08

Leveraging CLOUT

Action sought on child health care

By Charlie White
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The Courier-Journal

More than 1,000 members of a local interfaith advocacy group voiced their concerns to officials last night about issues they say pose threats to children's health.

Members of CLOUT — Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together — asked state and local leaders to lend their support toward developing a pilot program in Jefferson County to decrease the large number of low-income children who aren't enrolled in the Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program, KCHIP.

According to CLOUT, only about half of the 110,000 children believed to be eligible for the program are enrolled, and about 13,000 Louisville children are among those left out.

Last night's assembly, dubbed "Catch a Falling Child," was attended by 1,100 people and held at Fourth Avenue United Methodist Church at Fourth and St. Catherine streets in Old Louisville. It was standing room only.

LaTonya Cain, a Louisville mother whose 8-year-old child is asthmatic and requires a regimen of expensive prescription drugs, shared with the crowd her story of being dropped from the KCHIP program for having too much income even though she is financially eligible for food stamps.

Cain received a standing ovation after telling officials, "I need help."

Children up to 18 years old are eligible for KCHIP if their family earns 200 percent or less of the federal poverty level, currently $42,400 a year for a family of four.

CLOUT has blamed the low participation rate on the state's lack of outreach and a cumbersome application process that requires a face-to-face interview.

"There are still limited places whereby children can be signed up," the Rev. Elvyn Hamilton, CLOUT vice president, told the crowd.

Steve Nunn, deputy secretary of the state Cabinet for Health and Family Services, was one of the officials who attended last night. He said recently elected Gov. Steve Beshear will make good on a campaign promise to fix the KCHIP system and extend health-care coverage to every child in the state. He also got a standing ovation.

Dr. Adewale Troutman, director of the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness, told the crowd he will "tirelessly" work with other stakeholders to develop and implement the pilot program in Jefferson County, which aims to increase enrollment by at least 6,000 children in the next three years.

State Rep. Darryl Owens, D-Louisville, also attended, saying he introduced a bill during this legislative session to do away with the KCHIP face-to-face interview. "We didn't get much action on it, but we'll try again next year," Owens said before challenging CLOUT members to rally then in Frankfort.

Swimming pool closures

Also last night, CLOUT members urged metro government to reconsider a plan to close five swimming pools.

In February, the city announced that it planned to close five pools: Breslin, at Payne Street and Lexington Road; Shelby Park, at 600 E. Oak St.; and ones at Watterson Elementary, 3900 Breckenridge Lane; Hazelwood Elementary, 1325 Bluegrass Ave.; and Western High School, 2501 Rockford Lane.

The city has said the upkeep on the older pools was too much of an expense, and the use of outdoor city-run pools has declined as the popularity of water parks, such as the one at Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom, has increased.

Troutman, a former lifeguard in the Bronx borough of New York, spoke to the crowd on behalf of the city and Metro Parks last night, saying metro government would look into making sure all parts of the city have equal access to swimming facilities.

Yesterday a letter was sent to CLOUT by USA Swimming, the national governing body of competitive swimming, to express interest in developing pools in low-income Louisville neighborhoods and teaming up with Metro Parks to provide children's classes.

The letter was sent after Olympic gold medalist and native Louisvillian Mary T. Meagher Plant contacted USA Swimming about the pool closures.

The city agreed to explore the idea, said Troutman, who also read a letter of support from Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson.

Reporter Charlie White can be reached at (502) 582-4653.

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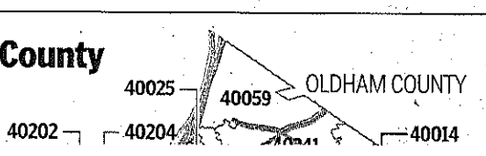

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