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Local Student in Tallahassee Town Hall Meeting

by Brittany Benner

TALLAHASSEE, FL -- State leaders are celebrating Children's Week in Tallahassee. One Jacksonville teen is using this opportunity to improve healthcare for children and their families.

Shaun Richardson, 17, is a creative writing student at Douglas Anderson School for the Performing Arts in Jacksonville. He's also one of a dozen students selected to participate in the "Kids Only" Town Hall meeting in Tallahassee. "Children and youth provide a unique view on the issues that affect everyone's daily lives," said Samantha Rogers, student moderator at the Town Hall meeting.

Students took turn asking questions about issues they think are important.

They're hoping to affect public policy by meeting with state leaders, including Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottcamp, Department of Health Secretary Dr. Ana Viamonte Ros, and former lawmakers.

They're talking about things like teen pregnancy, mentor programs, and healthcare.

Shaun Richardson said his family hasn't had health insurance for nearly a decade.

"What do you all plan to do to guarantee that my family and the other millions like us in the state can afford the rising cost of healthcare in today's failing economy?" asked Richardson.

He hopes to improve healthcare affordability and availability for his family and other Floridians.

"It is particularly a daunting problem for the kids of this state...and last year we heard there were like 600,000 kids who didn't have health insurance; that's a real problem," admitted Secretary Holly Benson of Florida's Agency for Healthcare Administration.

While panelists didn't have all the answers, they vowed to continue working toward a brighter future for generations to come.

"I just think that more programs like this should be in place; it's definitely important that the adults know what's happening with the children because we are...a future generation, so it would be nice if everybody just knew what was going on," said Richardson.

Richardson hopes to continue his fight for better healthcare coverage in the Sunshine State. He hopes to organize a more in-depth presentation and perhaps a summit at his school.