



December 1, 2014

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

As Congress returns to legislative session, **we urge you to enact a four year funding extension for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) this year.** While the CHIP program was reauthorized through 2019, the funding is currently set to expire in 2015 unless Congress approves its extension thereby continuing health care coverage for our nation's children.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, and the Catholic Health Association have a long tradition of working toward affordable and accessible health care for all, especially the most vulnerable members of our society, our children. The Catholic community is the largest nongovernmental provider of health care and human services in the nation. We serve those in need in our emergency rooms, hospitals, and clinics, and in our soup kitchens, shelters, and Catholic Charities agencies. One out of six patients in our country is cared for in a Catholic hospital. Our faith and our history call us to provide services, including accessible and affordable health care, to those who need it most and we continue to answer that call.

Since its bipartisan inception in 1997, CHIP has garnered widespread support from both parties and from an overwhelming majority of the nation's governors and state legislatures. CHIP has been a reliable source of coverage for low-income children in working families whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but too little to afford private health insurance.

Nearly 90 percent of the over 8 million children enrolled in the CHIP program in 2013 were in families with annual incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$39,060 for a family of three). If CHIP funding is not renewed, coverage for millions of children will be disrupted and as many as 2 million could become uninsured because employer-sponsored family coverage is unaffordable. We believe CHIP must be extended through the FY 2019 authorization period in order to ensure adequate, affordable coverage and a responsible transition for children to family coverage.

As Catholic organizations united by our common faith and committed to the principles of Catholic social teaching, we recognize and affirm the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and the inherent dignity of every human being. We consider access to adequate health care to be a basic human right, necessary for the development and maintenance of life and for the ability of human beings to realize the fullness of their dignity. A just society is one that protects and promotes fundamental human rights and dignity, with special attention to meeting

the basic needs of children and the vulnerable, including the need for safe and affordable health care. This is an important moral measure of our society and of this Congress.

We firmly believe that there is no reason why any child in our nation should go without access to health care, a basic right that is critically important to the well-being and development of children. Almost 93 percent of children have health coverage today and these incredible gains are in part because of the role of CHIP in covering millions of children nationwide. Extending funding for the CHIP program gives Congress a great opportunity to ensure a healthy start in the lives of our nation's children.

We urge Congress to take action as it is critical that you provide certainty on the future of the CHIP program *this year, without delay.* If we can be of further assistance on this vital issue, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic
Justice and Human Development
United States Conference of
Catholic Bishops



Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and CEO
Catholic Health Association
of the United States



Rev. Larry Snyder
President
Catholic Charities USA