

December 8, 2009

THE
CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,000 Catholic health care sponsors, systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and related organizations, I am writing to express several important concerns we have in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.



A longtime advocate of health reform, CHA and its members are committed to creating a health care system that ensures everyone will get the health care they need, when they need it. The 47 million individuals without insurance, the 16 million individuals who are underinsured and the insured who have trouble affording their current coverage are all in desperate need of changes to our health care system. It has been clear for many years now that fundamental, comprehensive reform of the health care system is not merely a financial or political issue, but a moral imperative as well.

Access to adequate health care is essential to promoting and respecting the inherent dignity of every individual from conception to natural death. This principle both grounds and guides CHA's positions on health care reform and requires us to seek important improvements to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, including:

Maintaining Current Law on Abortion and Preserving Provider Conscience Protections

CHA advocates and supports health reform legislation that prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion; respects conscience rights; and does not mandate abortion as part of a benefit package. Senators Ben Nelson and Orrin Hatch have introduced an amendment that will clearly and definitively maintain in health care reform the longstanding prohibition on federal funding for abortion, fulfilling the President's commitment of no federal funding for abortion. CHA supports the Nelson/Hatch amendment.

Increase Premium Subsidies for Low-income Individuals and Families

CHA advocates and supports health reform legislation that is affordable and accessible to all, with special attention to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. We are concerned that the subsidies in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act will not be sufficient to allow low-income families to purchase health care coverage. Those with incomes from 133%-150% of the federal poverty level would have to pay more than under either the House-passed reform bill or the Senate Finance Committee bill. We urge the Senate to increase the subsidies for low income individual and families.

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Reduce Medicare and Medicaid Disproportional Share Hospital Funding Reductions

CHA advocates and supports health reform legislation to ensure that each person has access to health care covering the life span of care. If enacted, the current provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act would leave 24 million people without health care coverage. While it may not be possible to guarantee that no one will remain uninsured, reform that leaves that many millions of people without health care cannot be considered complete. In addition, the uninsured will continue to come to Catholic and other hospitals for their care and will not be turned away. If the bill is not improved to cover significantly more people, then the proposed reductions in Medicare and Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) funding should be scaled back. We urge the Senate to improve the coverage numbers.

As the debate in the Senate moves forward in the coming days, we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to improve the bill in these ways, and in other policy areas of importance to the Catholic health ministry such as reforming our health care delivery system.

It is our understanding that the first opportunity to do so will come with a vote on the Nelson/Hatch amendment as early as today. We urge you to vote in favor of the Nelson/Hatch amendment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Carol Keehan".

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and CEO