



*A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care*

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and  
Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and  
Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, sponsors, and related organizations, I would like to thank you for releasing the discussion draft of the *Prepare for and Respond to Existing Viruses, Emerging New Threats, and Pandemics Act* (*PREVENT Pandemics Act*). This bipartisan legislation provides an opportunity to create a roadmap to ensuring that our country will have the tools to improve pandemic preparedness and strengthen public health for future success. As the Committee continues their work, we hope that a final bill provides support to hospitals, health care systems and long-term care facilities while also addressing the challenges faced by at-risk populations, including the racial and ethnic health disparities made evident these last two years.

As front-line providers during the pandemic, our members worked through many challenges while also continuing their longstanding commitment to build a just health system that works for everyone. CHA's members have affirmed their strong commitment to reducing health disparities and promoting health equity through our national campaign, [\*We Are Called\*](#). Catholic health care is guided by the belief that all people have inherent dignity, that we must work to promote the common good and that the poor and vulnerable must be a priority of our efforts. These values call us to work to eradicate racial and ethnic disparities in access to quality health care and health outcomes, which stand in direct opposition to the mission of Catholic health care and our social tradition. The imperative to identify and eliminate racial and health disparities has only increased in urgency as it relates to responding to pandemics in this country.

We support key provisions in the *PREVENT Pandemics Act* as a necessary federal counterpart to our work at the community level. These include measures to improve public health communication; improving coordination between federal, state and local public health departments; initiatives to support mental health and substance use disorder services; addressing the social determinants of health; bolstering and diversifying the public health workforce including community health workers; addressing medical supply chain issues to prevent shortages; and ensuring that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has the resources to monitor and forecast outbreaks.

Several recommendations for the Committee's consideration relate to the *National Task Force on the Response of the United States to the COVID-19 Pandemic* outlined in Section 101 of Subtitle A. We strongly support the need to review the challenges and the "impact of the pandemic on public health and health care systems," as outlined in the discussion draft. We also recommend that the Committee

add language exploring how the pandemic has strained long-term care services and those working to take care of seniors and aging communities, all of which were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Additionally, we ask that language be added so that members of the Task Force include representatives from the hospital and long-term care facilities. They will offer needed insights about the challenges their organizations faced, especially as it relates to shortages of medical supplies, health care workers and other vital resources.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on this draft legislation. We hope that the Committee continues to work in a bipartisan fashion to advance the *PREVENT Pandemics Act*. Please contact us if you have any questions or if we may be of service in advancing this important work. We thank you for your leadership on behalf of all the communities we are privileged to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sr. Mary Haddad". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM  
President and CEO