



*A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care*

March 3, 2021

U.S. 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 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, sponsors, and related organizations, **I am writing to urge you to pass a strengthened American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 as quickly as possible.** This legislation contains critical support for families who have lost health insurance during the COVID-19 pandemic while at the same time addressing the public health and economic crises in the country.

### **Expanding Health Care Access**

CHA continues to advocate for a just and equitable health care system and calls for health care to be available, affordable and accessible to everyone, paying special attention to poor and vulnerable individuals. Guided by this vision, we strongly support the bill's provisions to increase the value of and expand eligibility for premium tax subsidies in the Health Insurance Marketplaces. We also commend the bill's effort to guarantee affordability for many individuals and working families by ensuring that enrollees pay no more than 8.5% of their income for coverage and support the bill's provisions to increase subsidies and financial support for those who have experienced job loss and continued unemployment due to the economic crisis.

We strongly support the bill's investments in the Medicaid program—extending coverage for post-partum care to mothers for a full year; increasing support for home- and community-based services to expand care for many seniors and individuals; encouraging expanded access for nearly 4 million uninsured low-income adults in non-expansion Medicaid states through financial incentives to states; and fully covering COVID-19 vaccines and treatment for Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries.

Lastly, we support the bill's directed funding for programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Health Resources Services Administration to address the mental health, substance abuse and opioid challenges while also providing for a 100% federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) for mobile crisis intervention services.

### **Resources for Testing, Treatment and Vaccinations with a Focus on Health Equity**

The *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* makes commitments in testing, treatment and the distribution of vaccines prioritizing populations identified as most at risk for suffering negative health outcomes from COVID-19—namely the elderly, the poor, rural residents and communities of color. We support the provisions strengthening the national and global COVID-19 vaccination effort, the development and distribution of tests and personal protective equipment and the targeted investments in combating outbreaks in long-term care facilities. These increased federal investments outline a

commitment to health equity while also ensuring that marginalized populations like those living in rural communities, Native American reservations and territories are given the resources to combat the public health and economic crisis.

### **Bolstering the Social Safety Net**

Finally, we support the many components of the bill that meet the economic needs of struggling individuals, families and communities. These include the expansions of several tax credits that support families, extending and increasing the pandemic unemployment assistance program and creating the Pandemic Emergency fund for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Additionally, the bill bolsters important social safety net provisions to meet basic needs like increased aid to address food insecurity, additional funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, support for housing stability and the low-income home energy assistance program (LIHEAP).

### **Additions to Aid Safety-Net Providers**

Throughout the year our members have shown their courageous compassion in caring for their patients, families and communities affected by the coronavirus. While we are inspired by their tireless efforts at the forefront of responding to the pandemic, Catholic hospitals, long-term care facilities and other safety-net providers continue to face ongoing and financial challenges as they strive to respond to this unprecedented public health emergency and work to procure medical needs such as personal protective equipment (PPE), testing and vaccination supplies.

Over the last year, many facilities have changed their operations to focus on treating and expanding capacity for COVID-19 patients while protecting and caring for other patients, residents and staff. These efforts and the growing challenge of increasing capacity for a nationwide vaccination effort have resulted in unprecedented logistical and financial challenges for front-line health care providers.

**We therefore urge you to include additional support for front-line providers to further enhance the investments made the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*.** Specifically, we ask for the inclusion of:

- Senator Manchin's proposal for the creation of the *Health Care Heroes Sustainability Program Fund*, which would provide immediate assistance to many of our safety-net and rural providers by providing additional funding for COVID-19 relief;
- An increase in Medicaid FMAP by a total of 12% to ensure low-income individuals and families have access to critical care and coverage;

As we all work to heal and support our communities during this pandemic, we express our hope that Congress will work together to protect and support our communities, prevent further spread of the coronavirus, increase vaccinations, and bring this crisis to an end. We again urge swift passage of legislation that can deliver the necessary resources to save lives and support families and communities.

Sincerely,

  
Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM  
President and CEO