



August 6, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic Health Association of the United States, we write in support of the Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act (PCHETA), S. 693 and H.R. 1676.

Catholics believe that human life is a gift from God, a sacred gift that no one may dispose of at will. All persons, regardless of their medical condition, possess inherent dignity and are worthy of respect, protection and care. As our guidelines, the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, state, “Effective management of pain in all its forms is critical in the compassionate care of the seriously ill and dying.”

Palliative care is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of a serious illness - whatever the diagnosis – with the goal of improving quality of life for both the patient and the family. It is provided by a team of palliative care-trained specialists, including a physician, nurse, social worker, chaplain and other care specialists, who work with a patient's physician to provide an extra layer of support and care coordination. Palliative care is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness and can be provided together with curative treatment.

Palliative care has been shown to lower health care costs through reduced emergency room visits, time in the hospital and use of intensive care services. Studies also show that early access to palliative care for seriously ill patients improves their quality of life and in some cases even prolongs it.

While there has been considerable growth in the number of hospital-based palliative care programs across the United States, barriers in three key areas currently prevent full access to, and availability of, palliative care for all patients and families facing serious or life-threatening illness: an insufficient number of trained health care professionals; insufficient research funding to build the knowledge base that supports clinical practice in pain and symptom management,

communication skills and care coordination; and lack of awareness among patients and health care professionals about what palliative care is and when it should be provided.

S. 693 and H.R. 1676 would address these barriers by:

- Establishing a Palliative Care and Hospice Education Center to improve the training of interdisciplinary health professionals in palliative care;
- Authorizing grants to schools of medicine, teaching hospitals and GME programs to train physicians (including residents, trainees, and fellows) who plan to teach palliative medicine;
- Establishing a program to promote the career development of physicians who are board certified or board eligible in Hospice and Palliative Medicine;
- Establishing fellowship programs within the new Palliative Care and Hospice Education Centers to provide short-term intensive courses focused on palliative care workforce development and grants through career incentive awards for eligible health professionals who agree to teach or practice in the field of palliative care for at least 5 years; and
- Providing for the establishment of a national campaign to inform patients, families and health professionals about the benefits of palliative care and the services that are available to support patients with serious or life-threatening illness.

These important building blocks will help ensure that all patients facing serious illnesses have access to high quality palliative care. Your committee is urged to advance the Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act, and your consideration of our views on the legislation is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman
Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



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