



A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care

December 10, 2021

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization representing more than 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, clinics, service providers and organizations, I urge you to include vital health and social needs policies in the *Build Back Better* reconciliation legislation and recommend several necessary improvements to the bill being considered by the Senate.

Working as front-line providers during the pandemic, our members have provided compassionate, high-quality care to persons of all ages, races, faiths, and ethnic backgrounds with special attention to the poor and vulnerable. As we [have stated](#) from the beginning of these discussions, we see *Build Back Better* as transformative legislation that presents a historic opportunity to make substantial improvements to our nation's commitments to providing access to health care, reducing health disparities and promoting health equity, protecting life and conscience protections, and strengthening environmental protection programs and the social safety net for those most in need. As the Senate continues to finalize this legislation, we particularly urge you to:

Preserve important health coverage policies that expand access and affordability. This includes the important provisions that extend the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) Marketplace premium and cost-sharing tax subsidies and the income cap on premiums made under the *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARPA); close the "Medicaid Coverage Gap" for over two million uninsured, very low-income adults (those under 100% of the Federal Poverty Level), who live in the 12 Medicaid non-expansion states; permanently extend Medicaid postpartum coverage for mothers for a full year in all states; and permanently fund the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) while also requiring for 12 month continuous eligibility for children in CHIP and Medicaid to prevent coverage loss. We also support the additional investments in the Medicaid program as they relate to an increased federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) for newly eligible populations, coverage for justice-involved populations, and the expansion of the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic Demonstration, as well as the provisions addressing the affordability of prescription drugs.

Support policies that aid our front-line providers and invest in the well-being of staff by increasing the health care workforce; providing training programs that seek to promote diversity in health care professions; enhancing palliative care education; providing for policies that aid our rural health providers; permanently expanding the use of telehealth; and ensuring that our hospitals, long-term care facilities and health care organizations have the resources to retain health care staff due to ongoing labor shortages.

Retain funding for important public health initiatives that advance health equity by devoting critical resources for public health preparedness; reduce racial and ethnic health disparities in maternal

care by including many vital pieces of the *Black Maternal Health Momnibus*; investing in behavioral health and substance use disorder programs; aligning federal assistance programs for immigrants with those of the ACA and; providing additional support for access to affordable housing for low-income families.

While we support the language granting work permits in *Build Back Better*, we ask that you continue to advocate immigration reform by providing a pathway to lawful permanent status for certain immigrants including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Temporary Protected Status program participants, if not in the reconciliation bill then through a Senate vote for the *American Dream and Promise Act*.

We also urge you to strengthen the bill so that it continues to uphold current law prohibiting federal funding of abortions. We welcome the efforts to address these concerns in the Medicaid gap provisions and encourage you to work to provide similar protections in the legislation's health care affordability fund. We look forward to working with you on solutions which both promote greater access to health care for all Americans while at the same time upholding the bipartisan protections on life.

We applaud *Build Back Better's* investments in our eldercare system. The increased federal funding for Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) will help to ensure the elderly and those living with disabilities have the support they need, while at the same time supporting the caregiving workforce. We also applaud the expansion of coverage for hearing services in the Medicare program. *While we understand the intent of the on-site registered nurse requirement in the bill, we ask that the Senate reconsider this provision in light of ongoing healthcare worker shortages, which are more acute in the nursing home setting, and at a minimum provide additional funding to address critical nursing home staffing needs.*

Lastly, we ask that the Senate remove language that reduces Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments in non-expansion states. DSH payments are a vital source of support for many of our safety-net hospitals who serve our most vulnerable communities, and the proposed cuts extend beyond the temporary Medicaid Gap coverage fix.

As Catholic health care providers, we are committed to reducing health disparities, promoting health equity, protecting life and conscience, and ensuring that everyone in our nation has access to affordable health care and coverage. Following the challenges in the country these past two years, we hope that the Senate will not only provide the necessary resources to help our communities recover from the pandemic but also approve forward-thinking and transformative policies to benefit those living on the margins of society and our nation. We thank you for your leadership on behalf of all the communities we are privileged to serve.

Sincerely,


Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM
President and CEO