

February 26, 2007

**THE
CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION**
OF THE UNITED STATES

Senator Hillary Clinton
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Olympia Snowe
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Clinton and Senator Snowe,

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association, I am writing to thank you and to express our strong support for your proposed legislation, the "Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act" (ICHIA). The Catholic health ministry, comprising more than 2,000 Catholic health care sponsors, systems, hospitals, facilities, and related organizations, is founded upon a tradition of helping the poorest and most vulnerable among us, and is called to advocate on behalf of such vulnerable populations as our nation's immigrants.



ICHIA, which has broad bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, would grant states the option of covering legal immigrant children under the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and the Medicaid program and also allow states to cover legal immigrant pregnant women under the Medicaid program. As you know, legal immigrant children and pregnant women who have entered the country since August 22, 1996 are barred from federal Medicaid and SCHIP funding for five years. This restriction has further increased racial and ethnic health disparities among children in our society. We have seen health coverage among low-income immigrant children decline over the past decade, even while SCHIP and Medicaid expansions have overall boosted insurance coverage for children. This is the case even though many states with the greatest numbers of immigrant children have chosen to provide coverage using only state funds.

In addition to causing needless suffering, the long-term effects of inadequate health care services can prevent children, many of whom will become United States citizens, from reaching their full potential. The long-term health benefits of investing in prenatal care are well established, and we believe it is arbitrary to deny such coverage to low-income immigrant pregnant women simply because they arrived after a certain date, particularly when their children will be United States citizens at birth. This year, many members of Congress have joined with us in making a commitment to expand health coverage to all children. Redressing the arbitrary exclusion of legal residents from SCHIP and Medicaid is a vital component of making that commitment a reality.

Thank you again for your efforts to ensure health care coverage to some of our nation's most vulnerable members. We look forward to working with you in asking Congressional leadership to ensure that ICHIA is included in any SCHIP reauthorization bill.

Sincerely,

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

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and CEO

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