

February 8, 2005

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

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bingaman:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,000 Catholic healthcare sponsors, systems, facilities, and related organizations, I would like to offer our strong support for the "Start Healthy, Stay Healthy Act of 2005," which will help expand health coverage for uninsured low-income children and pregnant women.



The "Start Healthy, Stay Healthy Act of 2005" would remove current restrictions in SCHIP that permit covering pregnant women only up to age 18, and allow waiting periods for newborns that result in no coverage for health care services during the critical first months of life. The legislation also would allow states to expand Medicaid coverage to pregnant women with incomes over 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

For the first time in 44 years, the infant mortality rate in the United States rose this past year. The United States ranks 28th in infant mortality and 21st in maternal mortality, the worst among developed nations. By reducing the number of uninsured children and pregnant women in this country, thus ensuring mothers and their children proper medical care, your legislation can help reduce infant and maternal mortality.

The Catholic health ministry supports health insurance coverage for all and has served low-income children, pregnant women, and their families directly for over 275 years. The Catholic health care ministry is involved in joint efforts with Catholic Charities agencies at the local and national levels to increase outreach and enrollment in Medicaid/SCHIP. The "Start Healthy, Stay Healthy Act of 2005" would assist greatly with these and other similar efforts. CHA looks forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to enact this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Rodgers".

Michael Rodgers
Vice President, Advocacy and Public Policy

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