

November 2, 2005
United States 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 2,000 Catholic health care sponsors, systems, facilities, and related organizations, I am writing to ask your support in protecting Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries' access to care by opposing any amendments to the Budget Reconciliation legislation that will limit coverage or the ability to provide needed services.



We are pleased that the budget reconciliation proposal approved by the Senate Finance Committee does not allow for increases in Medicaid beneficiary premiums, co-pays and deductibles, and maintains a federal standard of core benefits to which all Medicaid beneficiaries are entitled. CHA also supports the provisions to freeze the compliance threshold for inpatient rehabilitation facilities at 50 percent for two years; provide grants to support rural PACE providers; and allow families of disabled children to buy-in to the Medicaid program. We urge that these positions be maintained in the final Senate bill.

Another provision included in the bill provides for 100 percent federal payments for Medicaid-eligible Katrina victims. CHA supports this provision and requests your support for amendments to provide health care coverage to all low-income hurricane survivors, regardless of categorical eligibility under Medicaid. We must make sure that victims of the hurricanes receive the medical care they need, and that hospitals and providers alone not carry the costs for care needed by low-income, uninsured hurricane victims.

As a health care ministry united by faith and committed to the principles of Catholic social teaching, we believe a just society is one that protects and promotes the fundamental rights of all its members. Our faith tradition insists that our common efforts pay particular attention to the needs of the poor and vulnerable, including reliable and affordable health care.

In this regard, CHA has serious concerns about the level of spending cuts to safety net programs included in the House reconciliation legislation, especially within Medicaid. We ask that the Senate make clear to members of the House during the reconciliation discussions that the Senate will not accept such detrimental changes to Medicaid, or the increased level of spending cuts to safety net programs included in the House bill. We believe that the House Medicaid provisions would cause many low-income beneficiaries who rely on Medicaid either to lose coverage or lose access to vital services.

We urge you to remember that the federal budget is more than a fiscal plan; it reflects our values as a society. The Catholic health care ministry urges you to work for a budget that does not neglect the needs of the least among us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sr. Carol Keehan".

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