

July 22, 2009

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:



On behalf of the Catholic Health Association (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,000 Catholic health care sponsors, systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and related organizations, I am writing to urge you to support the continued inclusion of strong protections of individual and institutional conscience rights in the FY2010 Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriation bill soon to be considered on the House floor.

The Catholic health ministry provides care throughout the nation to patients of all ages, races and religious beliefs. Building upon our country's tradition of pluralism and the freedom to exercise our beliefs, CHA has long supported language within the appropriations legislation to prohibit federal funding of abortions in the Medicaid program (Hyde amendment) and language to protect hospitals and other institutional and individual health care providers should they decline to provide, pay for, or refer for abortions (Weldon amendment). We believe that continuing to retain these protections in current law represents good public policy, and we are pleased that they have been included in the legislation recently approved by the House Appropriations Committee.

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Continuing to provide strong conscience protections is particularly important this year, as Congress debates the larger issue of overall health system reform. Given the complexities of that effort, revisiting the longstanding conscience protections traditionally supported by the Congress would only complicate matters. The Catholic health ministry remains committed to serving the health needs of all, and to achieving health reform that continues to respect the contributions and rights to conscience of religiously affiliated health care providers. Your support for the inclusion of Hyde-Weldon protections in the appropriations legislation will help ensure that our ministry continues to be able to provide care to our patients and to remain a voice in favor of health care that serves everyone.

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