

February 3, 2004

House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

We understand that the House of Representatives will soon consider H.R. 3030, Improving the Community Services Block Grant Act, and that amendments may be offered that are intended to undermine or limit the ability of religious entities receiving Community Services Block Grant funds to employ co-religionists and those who share their religious values. We are writing to urge you to oppose any such amendments.

The Catholic Church and other religious entities serve people of all faiths, often the most poor and vulnerable in our society, through education, health and social services agencies. Many of these agencies receive government funds or government funded services. Indeed, Catholic programs have been receiving government funds to provide assistance to the poor and needy for over one hundred fifty years. To maintain its very identity, a religious or faith-based organization must be able to consider an individual's religious affiliation and willingness to support the mission and values of the institution when making employment decisions. Congress recognized this need when it passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, by specifically exempting religious employers from the Title VII restrictions on consideration of religion in hiring decisions, and again in 1972 when it clarified the reach of the exemption.

Amending CSBG to prohibit the use of federal funds or services by religious organizations that give employment preferences based on religion would change the law in a way that could impair the ability of religious institutions, whether Catholic or sponsored by those of other faiths and denominations, to continue both to serve the poor and to determine for themselves who is best suited to carry out their mission.

We urge you to oppose any amendment that fails to respect the right of religious service providers to maintain and preserve their identity as they contribute to the common good through their essential services to those in need.

Sincerely,

Theodore Cardinal McCarrick
Archbishop of Washington
Chairman Domestic Policy Committee

Thomas A. DeStefano
President
Catholic Charities USA

Rev. Michael D. Place, STD
President and Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Health Association of the United States