

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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November 7, 2009

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative:

The Catholic Bishops of the United States have supported adequate and affordable health care for decades. Our Bishops' conference has been working with Members of Congress, the Administration and others to help fashion health care reform legislation that truly protects the life, dignity, health and consciences of all.

We are very pleased that the House leadership has agreed to allow the essential Stupak-Ellsworth-Pitts-Kaptur-Dahlkemper-Lipinski-Smith Amendment to be considered by the House. This amendment will add to the Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) crucial provisions that maintain the current protections against abortion funding and mandates. Specifically, it will achieve our objective of applying the provisions of the Hyde amendment to the public health plan and on the affordability credits in the exchanges called for in the legislation.

Passing this amendment allows the House to meet our criteria of preserving the existing protections against abortion funding in the new legislation. It also would fulfill President Obama's commitment in this area. Most importantly, it will ensure that no government funds will be used for abortion or health plans which include abortion. It is a major step forward. We express appreciation for the courageous and principled leadership of the Democratic pro-life caucus, especially Representatives Stupak, Ellsworth, Kaptur, Oberstar, Donnelly, Doyle, Dahlkemper, and others who played essential roles in persuading the House leadership to allow this essential amendment to come to the floor. We also welcome the wise decision of the House leadership to take this important procedural step which we believe will help pass much needed health care reform.

The Conference will remain vigilant and involved through this entire process to assure that these essential provisions are maintained and included in the final legislation. With this important step forward we hope the House can come together and finally move forward essential reform which truly will protect the life, dignity, conscience and health of all. We also hope the Senate will follow the example of the House and include these essential safeguards in their version of health care reform legislation.

We are deeply concerned about other aspects of health care reform, especially as it affects the poor and vulnerable in our midst. We will continue to insist that health care reform legislation protects conscience rights. We strongly support provisions in the legislation that will make health care more affordable for low-income people and the uninsured. We remain deeply concerned that immigrants be treated fairly and not lose the health care coverage that have now.

If the Motion to Recommit focuses on denying immigrants needed health care, as reported, we strongly urge Members to oppose the Motion to Recommit.

The nation and the Congress are now engaged in an intense and much needed national discussion on how to provide affordable and accessible health care for all. We are not experts on health care policy and cannot assess every provision of legislation as complex as this proposal. However, health care legislation is not just political, technical, or economic, but also moral. Health care reform is about life and death, who can take their children to the doctor and who cannot, who can afford decent health care coverage and who are left to fend for themselves.

For the Catholic Church, health care is a basic human right and providing health care is an essential ministry. We pick up the pieces of this failing system in our emergency rooms, clinics, parishes and communities. This is why we strongly support Congressional action on health care reform which protects human life and dignity and serves the poor and vulnerable as a moral imperative and an urgent national priority.

Sincerely,



Bishop William Murphy
Diocese of Rockville Centre
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development



Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Chairman
Committee on Pro-life Activities