



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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September 21, 2017

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As you consider the “Graham-Cassidy” legislation as a possible replacement for the Affordable Care Act, we urge you to think of the harm that will be caused to poor and vulnerable people and amend the legislation while retaining its positive features. Without significant improvement, this bill does not meet the moral criteria for health care reform outlined in our previous letters, and must be changed.

The Graham-Cassidy bill includes a Medicaid “per capita cap” that was part of previous bills which have been rejected. The Medicaid caps will fundamentally restructure this vital program which supports the medical needs of those most in need. Over time, these modifications will result in deep funding cuts and lost coverage for millions of people. The Senate should only proceed with a full report concerning just how many people will be impacted. Our nation must not attempt to address its fiscal concerns by placing an insufferable health care burden on the backs of the poor.

The legislation does correct a serious flaw in the Affordable Care Act by ensuring that no federal funds are used for abortion or go to plans that cover it. This improvement is praiseworthy, and it is essential that any improved final bill retain these key provisions which would finally address grave moral problems in our current health care system. We also applaud that Graham-Cassidy redirects funds from organizations that provide abortion.

A distinct feature of the Graham-Cassidy bill is the use of block grants to states in place of premium tax credits, cost-sharing subsidies and the Medicaid expansion. While flexibility can be good at times, these block grants will result in billions of dollars in reductions for those in health care poverty. States already face significant deficits each budget cycle, and these block grants mean dollars intended for low income individuals and families will suddenly face competition from many other state priorities. Our country can ill afford to put access to health care for those most in need in jeopardy this way; the costs to our communities, including public and private organizations at all levels, will be too high.

Decisions about the health of our citizens—a concern fundamental to each of us—should not be made in haste simply because an artificial deadline looms. The far-reaching implications of Congress’ actions are too significant for that kind of governance. Instead, the common good should call you to come together in a bi-partisan way to pass thoughtful legislation that addresses the life, conscience, immigrant access, market stability and affordability problems that now exist. Your constituents, especially those with no voice of their own in this process, deserve no less.

Sincerely,

His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

Most Rev. William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty

Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Most Rev. Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin
Chairman, Committee on Migration