



Office of
Domestic
Social
Development



The
Catholic Health
Association
Of the United States

Catholic
Charities
USA



March 15, 2007

The Budget Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, and the Catholic Health Association, we are writing to urge you to include funding in the FY 2008 budget resolution to maintain and expand health insurance coverage for children. We also wish to express our deep concern about proposals to reduce funding for Medicaid and Medicare in ways which would adversely impact health care for the poor and elderly.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was enacted to provide coverage to low-income children who do not qualify for Medicaid because their family income is too high. Over 4 million children have health care coverage through SCHIP. But there are still almost 9 million uninsured children in the United States, over two-thirds of whom are eligible for SCHIP or Medicaid but are not enrolled.

We are encouraged that the President's FY2008 budget proposal includes increased funding for children's health care. However, the proposed additional \$5 billion dollars for the SCHIP program over the next five years will not be sufficient even to continue covering those currently enrolled in SCHIP, let alone covering additional eligible children. By some estimates, accomplishing both goals (maintaining current enrollment and providing coverage to the remaining eligible children) and addressing the funding shortfall for FY 2007 would require a funding commitment of \$60 billion over the next five years. We strongly urge you to make sure the budget resolution includes enough resources for these purposes.

The Administration's proposal would require states to limit SCHIP eligibility levels to children under 200 percent of the federal poverty level, restricting their current flexibility under the law to include children at higher income levels. While we share the desire to make the SCHIP program work better for those it serves, we are concerned that this restriction could eliminate health coverage for many children who are currently covered under the program. Congress should make no changes that would increase the number of uninsured children.

We are also concerned about the deep cuts the President has proposed to the Medicaid and Medicare programs (\$24.7 billion and \$66 billion, respectively, over five years). While it is appropriate to look for ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs, we urge you to scrutinize these proposals very carefully. For example, much of the proposed Medicaid savings would result not from substantive improvements in the program but

from mere reduction in the federal contribution. This could result in low-income families, people with disabilities, and seniors facing higher payments for services or even losing coverage altogether. The proposals could also severely threaten the ability of many Catholic hospitals, clinics, and long-term care facilities to serve their communities and could further unravel an already frail health care safety net. We urge you to reject any funding reductions in Medicaid or Medicare that could result in less access to health care for those in need.

As Catholic organizations united by our common faith and committed to the principles of Catholic social teaching, we recognize and affirm the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and the inherent dignity of every human being. We consider access to adequate health care to be a basic human right, necessary for the development and maintenance of life and for the ability of human beings to realize the fullness of their dignity. A just society is one that protects and promotes fundamental human rights and dignity, with special attention to meeting the basic needs of children and the vulnerable, including the need for safe and affordable health care.

The Catholic community, recognized as the largest nongovernmental provider of human services and health care to low income families, encounters the poor in our soup kitchens, shelters, and Catholic Charities agencies, in our emergency rooms and clinics. They are our neighbors, our patients, and our parishioners. They have names and faces. One out of six patients in our country is cared for in Catholic hospitals. Our faith and our history call us to provide services, including accessible and affordable health care, to those who need it most and we will continue to answer that call.

We understand the difficult challenges Congress faces in light of competing budget demands and the need to ensure that federal programs are efficient and effective. No program is without flaw and we are very willing to work with you to identify ways to improve SCHIP, Medicaid and Medicare in ways that protect the health and well-being of the people who are served by and depend upon these essential safety net programs.

Congress has a great opportunity to make a profound difference in the lives of our nation's children. We encourage you to do what is necessary to make sure all children have health care coverage. If we can be of further assistance on this vital issue, please do not hesitate to contact us. You have our prayerful support at this important time.

Sincerely



Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Larry Snyder
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