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May 22, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Senators,

We are writing on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to urge you to secure a bipartisan consensus on reauthorization of S. 2731, the Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008, also known as PEPFAR. This consensus should have as its basis PEPFAR's current focus on saving lives.

As you can see from the enclosed letter that we recently sent to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we are encouraged by efforts to resolve our outstanding concerns regarding S. 2731. Some of the changes to existing law that were proposed in the Committee bill risked deflecting our nation's leadership in combating these serious health crises. We urge you to move forward with the reauthorization of this program by seeking consensus among your colleagues on this urgent piece of legislation.

The activities of Catholic health institutions extend from major urban centers to the most remote rural villages, delivering approximately 25% of all HIV and AIDS care worldwide. Programming of HIV and AIDS activities in sub-Saharan Africa requires advanced planning. Many institutions have limited independent resources and are reluctant to make programming decisions until they have a firm funding commitment. The risk of a hiatus in assured funding, however brief, could disrupt treatment regimens, undermine the credibility of healthcare institutions providing HIV services, and endanger lives.

On the basis of CRS's extensive experience in 12 PEPFAR focus countries, we urge an expeditious consideration of S. 2731 on the Senate floor and completion of the reauthorization process in this session of Congress to avoid any possible disruption in the vital work of all those involved in this life-saving initiative.

With appreciation for your continued support for addressing the critical health needs of the poor around the world, we remain,

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski  
Bishop of Orlando  
Chairman, Committee on International  
Justice and Peace

Ken Hackett  
President  
Catholic Relief Services