

January 18, 2011

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As Congress prepares to resume debate on health care reform, we wish to make clear the position and priorities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on this vitally important issue.

Throughout the last Congress the Catholic bishops of the United States affirmed our strong support for universal access to health care. Basic health care for all is a moral imperative, not yet completely achieved. It has never been, and is not now, for the bishops to decide the best means to realize that essential goal. However, regardless of which means are chosen, they must fall within certain fundamental moral parameters, which the bishops have a duty to articulate strongly and clearly. We have urged and continue to urge that legislation on health care reform reflect the following three moral criteria:

- Ensure access to quality, affordable, life-giving health care for all;
- Retain longstanding requirements that effectively protect conscience rights and that prohibit use of federal funds for elective abortions or plans that include them; and
- Protect the access to health care that immigrants currently have and remove current barriers to access.

Rather than joining efforts to support or oppose the repeal of the recently enacted health care law, we will continue to devote our efforts to correcting serious moral problems in the current law, so health care reform can truly be life-affirming for all.

In the 111th Congress, H.R. 5111 was introduced by Congressmen Pitts and Lipinski to ensure that the new health care law will maintain longstanding federal policies on abortion in the areas of federal funding and conscience rights. H.R. 6570 was also introduced by Congressman Fortenberry to ensure that all people -- Catholics and others alike -- maintain their current ability under federal law to provide and purchase health coverage that is consistent with their faith and values. We will strongly support laws like these in the new Congress and we will seek ways to ensure a more just health care system for immigrant families.

For nearly a century, the Catholic bishops of the United States have called for reform of our health care system so all may have access to care that recognizes and affirms their human dignity. As Pope Benedict recently stated, in the health care sector "it is important to establish a real distributive justice which, on the basis of objective needs, guarantees

adequate care to all.” Moreover, “if it is not to become inhuman, the world of health care cannot disregard the moral rules that must govern it” (Message to the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, November 15, 2010). We wholeheartedly commit ourselves to health care reform that achieves these worthy goals. We will advocate for addressing the current problems in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, as well as others that may become apparent in the course of its implementation.

Sincerely,
Cardinal Daniel DiNardo
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Chairman
Committee on Pro-life Activities

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire
Diocese of Stockton
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

Archbishop Jose H. Gomez
Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Chairman
Committee on Migration