



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

January 18, 2017

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As you begin the 115th Congress, I urge you to work in a bipartisan fashion to protect vulnerable Americans and preserve important gains in health care coverage and access. The Catholic bishops of the United States have consistently advocated for access to decent health care that safeguards and affirms human life and dignity from conception until natural death. In a 2009 letter to Congress, my predecessor as Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Bishop William Murphy, wrote: “All people need and should have access to comprehensive, quality health care that they can afford, and it should not depend on their stage of life, where or whether they or their parents work, how much they earn, where they live, or where they were born. *The Bishops’ Conference believes health care reform should be truly universal and it should be genuinely affordable.*”


Every person is made in the image of God and possesses inherent dignity. A just community strives to see and address the needs of those who struggle on its margins, and each segment of society is called to build toward a common good that creates and maintains conditions aimed at true human flourishing. In our country’s policies toward that end, we must not see health care as a luxury, but as a necessary building block to help individuals and families thrive and contribute to the good of the community and the nation.

In his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, Saint John XXIII wrote: “We must speak of man's rights. Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services.” (no. 11). Like his predecessors, Pope Francis continues to echo this teaching, recently saying, “Health, indeed, is not a consumer good, but a universal right which means that access to healthcare services cannot be a privilege” (Address to “Doctors with Africa-CUAMM,” May 7, 2016).

While we supported the general goal of the law to expand medical coverage for many poor and vulnerable people, the USCCB ultimately opposed the Affordable Care Act because it expanded the role of the federal government in funding and facilitating abortion and plans that cover abortion, and it failed to provide essential conscience protections and access to health care for immigrants. We recognize that the law has brought about important gains in coverage, and those gains should be protected. The Catholic bishops of the United States will examine health care proposals in greater depth and from various perspectives in the days ahead. But we note for now that **a repeal of key provisions of the Affordable Care Act ought not be undertaken without the concurrent passage of a replacement plan that ensures access to adequate health care for the millions of people who now rely upon it for their wellbeing.** Particularly for those who would otherwise be required to use limited resources to meet basic needs such as food and shelter rather than seek medical care, the introduction of great uncertainty at this time would prove particularly devastating.

We remain committed to the ideals of universal and affordable health care, and to the pursuit of those ideals in a manner that includes protections for human life, conscience and immigrants. We urge you to approach the important debates in the days ahead seeking also to honor these principles for the good of all.

Sincerely,


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



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January 18, 2017

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

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