

## **Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania issue statement on health care reform**

**HARRISBURG (October 13)** - Health care reform was discussed at a meeting of Pennsylvania's Catholic Bishops on October 6, 2009. Together, they issue the following statement:

Our Catholic moral tradition teaches that every human being, from the moment of conception to natural death, has an innate dignity that entitles him or her to certain rights and protections. Included among these is the right to life and to have access to health care, which is essential to preserving human life and promoting human dignity. As the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania, we must frankly express our concerns that the health care reform proposals currently under review by the U.S. Congress do not yet guarantee these fundamental rights.

True health care reform must maintain longstanding public policies which restrict funding for abortion and respect the consciences of health care providers. The cost structures of the resulting plan must not impose excessive financial burdens on low and moderate-income individuals and families. Measures must be in place to safeguard the health of all of society, including the poor, the elderly, and immigrants. Legal immigrants and their family members must be allowed timely access to comprehensive and affordable health care coverage and an adequate safety net must be maintained for those who remain uncovered.

The Catholic community of Pennsylvania can be a strong and reliable partner in advancing health care reform; but as faith leaders, we cannot and will not support or urge the Catholic faithful to support reform that violates the Church's long held principles on life and dignity. We will work tirelessly to improve the legislation to reflect these essential priorities.

Health care is not just another issue for the Church or for a healthy society. It is a fundamental issue. Health care is a critical component of the Catholic Church's ministry. Every year, Pennsylvania's Catholic hospitals, nursing homes and home health agencies provide quality health care to millions. The Church itself is a major purchaser of health insurance for thousands of employees in our many agencies and institutions. In some cases, the Church is self-insured. The Catholic Church in Pennsylvania brings both strong convictions and everyday experience to the issue of health care reform.

This debate presents our country with a unique opportunity to improve the health care system for all, especially those who lack affordable coverage and decent care. We believe that health care reform legislation can be drafted to truly protect human life and dignity.

Catholics have been leading proponents of health care reform for many years in America. If a final health care reform bill does not have respect for life at all stages of development, respect for consciences, affordability and inclusion of all of society, the Bishops will be forced to oppose it. Therefore, we pray that critical shortcomings in the current proposals will be remedied.

The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) is the public affairs arm of the Catholic Bishops and their dioceses in Pennsylvania. More information about the Bishops' position on health care reform and other issues is available at [www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org).

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