



Statement on Health Care Reform

From the Bishops of the Texas Catholic Conference

October 27, 2009

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In 2005, the Texas Catholic Conference issued a pastoral statement on the urgent need for health care reform. Today, as the health care debate unfolds in our nation's capitol, the Bishops of Texas feel it is once again appropriate to express hope that our national leaders will work together to bring about genuine life-affirming reform to our nation's health care system.

Improving our nation's health care system is the responsibility of all. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, addressing the Pontifical Council for Health Care, reiterated this responsibility, stating that "going to the aid of the human being is a duty: both in response to a fundamental right of the person and because the care of individuals redounds to the benefit of the group."

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, including the fundamental right to life and the right to affordable healthcare, which flows from the right to life.

As the Catholic Bishops of Texas, we are hopeful that such reform legislation will someday be enacted into law. However, we must also express our concerns that the current healthcare reform proposals being considered by the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate do not yet rise to the level of guaranteeing these fundamental rights and protections.

True health care reform must maintain longstanding public policies that restrict funding for abortion and respect the consciences of health care providers. The language in the Capps amendment, which is part of several proposed bills, does not adequately ensure the protection of all human life. In addition, the cost structures of any health care reform plan must not impose excessive financial burdens on low and moderate income individuals and families. Measures must also be in place to safeguard the health of all of society, including the poor, the elderly, and immigrants. Legal immigrants and their families 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.

Health care reform is a vital concern to us in Texas, as our state has one of the highest numbers of uninsured persons in the nation. Health care is a fundamental component of the Catholic Church's ministry. In Texas there are 43 Catholic acute care hospitals, 8 nursing homes and 17 other Catholic-sponsored service organizations including hospice, home health, assisted living, and senior housing facilities that provide quality health care to millions. The Church itself is a major purchaser of health insurance for the thousands of employees in our many agencies and institutions. The Catholic Church in Texas brings both everyday experience and strong convictions to the issue of health care reform.

The Catholic Bishops of Texas will continue to support reform of our nation's health care system in ways that respect the lives of all human persons while providing affordable access to health care for all. We will be a committed partner in advancing reform on this life-and-death issue; but if the final form of the legislation does not include acceptable language in these areas then we will have to oppose it vigorously. We will continue to pray that our national leaders will place the poor and those most vulnerable first, for only when they do will our nation achieve genuine health care reform.