

Archdiocese of Cincinnati Statement on Health Care Reform

August 2009

When it comes to public policies, we Catholics frequently bring a moral position that can best be described as “both/and” in its approach, rather than “either/or.” I believe this is readily apparent in how we have participated in the current debate on health care reform in our country. I encourage you to reflect upon this joint statement from the Archdiocese Family Life and Catholic Social Action Offices. I hope you will take the time to urge our elected officials to support both access to health care for all and a respect for life from conception until natural death. This position reflects the consistent ethic of life teaching of our faith tradition. Thank you.

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk
Archbishop of Cincinnati

Reforming Health Care, Protecting Life

In our Catholic tradition, health care is a basic human right. Access to health care should not depend on where a person works, how much a family earns, or where a person lives. Instead, every person, created in the image and likeness of God, has a right to life and to those things necessary to sustain life, including affordable, quality health care. (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009: www.usccb.org/healthcare)

In our nation, at least 46 million Americans are living without health insurance, and 64 percent of those uninsured are employed full-time. At one public forum recently held in Cincinnati, a low-income, full-time working woman shared an unfortunately all too typical story:

“I underwent surgery for breast cancer and had radiation treatment. After this I was dropped from my health insurance when the premiums went too high. I am supposed to be taking medication for this treatment but I cannot afford it. I need to be under a doctor’s care and take medication but I cannot afford it.”

In our current recession, stories like this are sadly becoming more common. Our Catholic community locally experiences this reality firsthand on multiple fronts. As social service providers, our Catholic agencies and St. Vincent de Paul groups hear too often from families who can’t afford insurance or who have to choose between eating and taking their medications. As health providers, our Catholic hospitals and other facilities provide millions of dollars of charity care for the poor, and already many of them have stretched beyond their annual budgets to serve the uninsured. As an employer, the Archdiocese and its affiliated entities continue to be squeezed financially by rising health care premiums for its employees, just like most other businesses and non-profits.

Therefore, we are pleased that Congress and the Administration are finally intent on reforming our health care system. Our Church views this as an opportunity that should not be buried by partisan politics or misleading exaggerations of what the emerging legislation does or does not include. The Catholic Church does not endorse any



particular prescription for what a revamped system should look like. But we hope that civil dialogue will produce an affordable method that provides ready access to quality, comprehensive and affordable health care for every person living in the United States.

At the same time, however, this reform must not include any expansion of abortion. The U.S. bishops have asserted that legislation must be “abortion neutral.” Cardinal Justin Rigali spoke on behalf of the bishops recently, stating, “Much-needed reform must not become a vehicle for promoting an ‘abortion rights’ agenda or reversing longstanding policies against federal funding and mandated coverage of abortion.” Since 1976, the Hyde Amendment has prohibited federal funding for any health benefits package that includes abortion, except in limited cases when the life of the mother is endangered or in cases of rape or incest. Reform cannot come at the price of trimming away this three decade-old policy. Also, no reform should mandate that private health plans cover elective abortion.

In addition, whatever system emerges must include “conscience protections.” Currently, no federal agency or program can discriminate against individual or institutional health care providers and insurers because they refuse to perform, provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortion. That must continue.

The U.S. bishops have provided us with the following talking points that we can share with our elected officials. You can find your Representative and Senators at house.gov and senate.gov, or call the Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121. Please tell them health care reform should:

- Include health care coverage for all people from conception until natural death, and continue the federal ban on funding for abortions;
- Include access for all with a special concern for the poor;
- Pursue the common good and preserve pluralism, including freedom of conscience; and
- Restrain costs and apply costs equitably among payers.

The U.S. bishops have just launched an excellent website that explains the Church’s viewpoints on this issue: <http://www.usccb.org/healthcare/>. We hope that parishes and other Catholic organizations will spread the word about this resource. We also encourage them to distribute an action alert that can be found on the site which promotes advocacy for a health care reform that provides access for all and respects all human life.

Tony Stieritz
Director, Catholic Social Action Office

Deacon Fred Merritt
Director, Family Life Office

Mary Anne Boyd
Respect Life Coordinator

