

U.S. Bishops Urge Congress to Observe Respect for Life, Access for All in Health Care Legislation

WASHINGTON—“Genuine health care reform that protects the life and dignity of all is a moral imperative and a vital national obligation,” said Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., as he outlined the policy priorities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on the issue of health care in a July 17 letter to Congress. The letter supported efforts to pass health care reform, but warned against inclusion of abortion.

Writing on behalf of the bishops as chairman of their Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Bishop Murphy said the bishops have advocated comprehensive health care reform for decades and recommended four criteria for fair and just health care reform: respect for human life and dignity, access for all, pluralism and equitable costs.

“Two of these criteria need special attention as Congress moves forward with health care reform,” Bishop Murphy said.

On respecting life and dignity, he said, “No health care reform plan should compel us or others to pay for the destruction of human life, whether through government funding or mandatory coverage of abortion. Any such action would be morally wrong.”

After citing protections from public funding of abortion in U.S. law, Bishop Murphy added, “Health care reform cannot be a vehicle for abandoning this consensus which respects freedom of conscience and honors our best American traditions. Any legislation should reflect longstanding and widely supported current policies on abortion funding, mandates and conscience protections because they represent sound morality, wise policy and political reality.”

On the issue of access for all, Bishop Murphy said, “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.*”

He went on to cite that, even after the implementation of health care reform, some families, including many immigrants, will not be covered and urged Congress to adequately fund clinics and hospitals that serve as a safety net for these people.

The full text of Bishop Murphy’s letter can be found online at:
www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/2009-07-17-murphy-letter-congress.pdf