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Thousands of Catholic sisters support health care reform

by Dennis Coday

NCR Today

Here's a media statement from Network:

Catholic Sisters Support Passage of Healthcare Bill

Washington DC: NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, released the text of a letter to Congress supporting healthcare legislation from organizations and communities representing tens of thousands of Catholic Sisters. This letter (text below), which is being delivered to each Member of Congress today, comes just days after a statement in support of passing healthcare reform by Sister Carol Keehan, President and CEO of the Catholic Health Association.

NETWORK strongly supports both documents and is working on all levels to promote passage in the next few days of a strong healthcare bill that will extend healthcare coverage to millions more people while eliminating unjust practices in the healthcare field.

(See NETWORK's reaction to Catholic Health Association statement.)

This is the text of the letter being sent to all Members of Congress:

Dear Members of Congress:

We write to urge you to cast a life-affirming "yes" vote when the Senate health care bill (H.R. 3590) comes to the floor of the House for a vote as early as this week. We join the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), which represents 1,200 Catholic sponsors, systems, facilities and related organizations, in saying: the time is now for health reform AND the Senate bill is a good way forward.

As the heads of major Catholic women's religious order in the United States , we represent 59,000 Catholic Sisters in the United States who respond to needs of people in many ways. Among our other ministries we are responsible for running many of our nation's hospital systems as well as free clinics throughout the country.

We have witnessed firsthand the impact of our national health care crisis, particularly its impact on women, children and people who are poor. We see the toll on families who have delayed seeking care due to a lack of health insurance coverage or lack of funds with which to pay high deductibles and co-pays. We have counseled and prayed with men, women and children who have been denied health care coverage by insurance companies. We have witnessed early and avoidable deaths because of delayed medical treatment.

The health care bill that has been passed by the Senate and that will be voted on by the House will expand coverage to over 30 million uninsured Americans. While it is an imperfect measure, it is a crucial next step in realizing health care for all. It will invest in preventative care. It will bar insurers from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions. It will make crucial investments in community health centers that largely serve poor women and children. And despite false claims to the contrary, the Senate bill will not provide taxpayer funding for elective abortions. It will uphold longstanding conscience protections and it will make historic new investments ? \$250 million ? in support of pregnant women. This is the REAL pro-life stance, and we as Catholics are all for it.

Congress must act. We are asking every member of our community to contact their congressional representatives this week. In this Lenten time, we have launched nationwide prayer vigils for health care reform. We are praying for those who currently lack health care. We are praying for the nearly 45,000 who will lose their lives this year if Congress fails to act. We are also praying for you and your fellow Members of Congress as you complete your work in the coming days. For us, this health care reform is a faith mandate for life and dignity of all of our people.

We urge you to vote "yes" for life by voting yes for health care reform in H.R. 3590.

Sincerely,

Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA
LCWR President
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Joan Chittister, OSB
Co-Chair Global Peace Initiative of Women
Erie , PA

Sr. Mary Persico, IHM
President
Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
Scranton , PA

Sr. Susan Hadzima, IHM
Councilor for Missioning and Community Life

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
Scranton , PA

Mary Genino (RSHM)
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
Western American Province .

Nancy Conway CSJ
Congregation Leadership Team
The Congregation of St. Joseph

Debra M. Sciano, SSND
Provincial Leader
Milwaukee Province , School Sisters of Notre Dame

Josephine Gaugier, OP
Adrian Dominican Sisters
Holy Rosary Mission Chapter Prioress
Adrian , MI

Kathleen Nolan, OP
Adrian Dominican Sisters
Office of the General Council

Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA, President
Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
La Crosse , WI

Corinne Weiss
Servants of Jesus Leadership Team
Saginaw MI

Adrian Dover OP
Prioress
Dominican Sisters of Houston , Texas

Rose Mary Dowling, FSM
President
Franciscan Sisters of Mary

Leadership Team
Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
(from Mary Martens, BVM
Administrative Assistant)

Beatrice Haines, OLVN
President, Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters
Huntington IN

Joan Saalfeld, SNJM, Provincial
Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary
U.S.-Ontario Province

Jo'Ann De Quattro, SNJM
Sisters of the Holy Names
U.S.-Ontario Province Leadership Team

Sharon Simon, OP
President
Racine Dominicans

Maryann A. McMahon, O.P.
Vice President
Dominican Sisters of Racine , WI

Agnes Johnson, OP
Vice President
Racine Dominicans

Pat Mulcahey, OP
Prioress of Sinsinawa Dominicans

Pam Chiesa, PBVM
President
Sisters of the Presentation, San Francisco

Patricia Anne Cloherty, PBVM
Leadership Team, Sisters of the Presentation, San Francisco

Gloria Inés Loya
Leadership Team
Sisters of the Presentation, San Francisco

Gloria Marie Jones, OP
Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose
Congregational Prioress and Council

Mary Litell
Provincial Councilor
Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity St. Francis Province

Theresa Sandok, OSM
Servants of Mary (Servite Sisters)
Ladysmith , Wisconsin

Sr Claire Graham SSS
General Director
Sisters of Social Service

Encino CA

Margaret Byrne CSJP - Congregation Leader
Teresa Donohue CSJP - Assistant Congregation Leader
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

Sr. Carmelita Latiolais, S.E.C.
Sisters of the Eucharistic Covenant

Joan Mumaw, IHM ? Vice President
On behalf of the Leadership Council
Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
Monroe , Michigan

Sister Clare of Assisi Pierre, SSF
Sisters of the Holy Family
New Orleans , LA

Sister Marla Monahan, SND
Provincial
Sisters of Notre Dame
(St. Claire Regional Medical Center in Morehead , KY
and St. Charles Care Center in Covington , KY)

Vivien Linkhauer , SC
Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill , United States Province
Greensburg , PA

Dolores Maguire
Sisters of the Holy Faith
Northern California LCWR Region XIV

Sr. Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, OSB
Subprioress
Mount St. Scholastica
Atchison , KS

Marianites of Holy Cross
Sr. Suellen Tennyson, MSC
Congregational Leader

Barbara Hagedorn, SC
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati
Mt. St. Joseph , Ohio

Francine Schwarzenberger OP
Dominican Sisters of Peace
Denver , Colorado

Sister Maureen McCarthy
School Sisters of St. Francis
U.S. Provincial Team
Milwaukee , WI

Eileen C. Reid, RJM
Provincial Superior
Religious of Jesus and Mary
Washington DC

Sister Cecilia Dwyer, O.S.B.
Prioress
Benedictine Sisters of Virginia

The Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Sister Joann Sambs, CSA
General Superior

Sisters of St. Francis
Tiffin , Ohio
(from Sr. Mary Kuhlman)

Sr. Helen McDonald, SHCJ
Province Leader
Society of the Holy Child Jesus

Leadership Team
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Dayton , OH

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Sister Michelle Wronkowski, SSJ-TOSF
Sister Dorothy Pagosa, SSJ-TOSF
Sister Linda Szocik, SSJ-TOSF

Sr. Gladys Guenther SHF
Sisters of the Holy Family
Congregational President
Fremont , CA

Sr. Dorothy Maxwell, Councilor
Sisters of St. Dominic
Blauvelt New York

Sheral Marshall, OSF
Provincial Councilor
Sisters of St Francis

Marilyn Kerber, SNDdeN
Canonical Representative, Ohio Province

Sisters of St. Louis , California Region
(from Sr. Michele Harnett, SSL)

Ruth Goodwin, OSF
Sisters of ST. Francis of Philadelphia

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Sr. Joanne Buckman, OSU
Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland

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