



Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Children's Health and the Environment
February 2007

ISSUE

Children are more vulnerable to environmental hazards. Their bodies, behaviors and size leave them more exposed than adults to such health hazards. Because children are exposed to environmental hazards at an early age, they have more extended time to develop slowly-progressing environmentally triggered illnesses such as asthma, certain cancers and learning disabilities. Exposure to air pollutants and toxins is significantly more harmful to children, born and unborn. Children in poverty and children of color are at a disproportionate risk, with routinely higher rates of lead poisoning and asthma-related deaths and hospitalization.

BACKGROUND

In an effort to develop the leadership of Catholic institutions to help address environmental hazards affecting children's health, a coalition of major Catholic organizations formed the *Catholic Coalition for Children and a Safe Environment* (CASE).¹ This network of national Catholic institutions assists the bishops in sharing Church teaching on the environment, justice, the common good, stewardship and option for the poor, and how these social teachings urge us as Catholics to care for creation and protect the lives of children who are vulnerable to environmental threats.

CASE partners have collaborated as speakers in diocesan and parish gatherings, especially during Respect for Life month and for the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Other highlights from 2006 activities included:

- The 2006-2007 Respect Life Program includes the article contributed by the Department of Social Development, "*Protecting Children in their First Environment, the Womb,*" which is being used by CASE partners and others to educate people in the dioceses, parishes, Catholic lay organizations and Catholic institutions about the importance of protecting children's health and the environment from hazards from before birth.
- In July 2006, CASE partner, Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary, featured their new educational DVD, *Struggles for Environmental Justice and Health in Chicago: African American and Catholic Perspectives*, during their national convention held in Houston, TX. The new DVD will be distributed through USCCB Publishing.

¹ CASE is made up of the following members: Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA); Catholic Health Association (CHA); Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI); Conference for Catholic Facility Management (CCFM); Knights of Peter Claver, Inc. and Ladies Auxiliary (KPC); National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW); National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA); National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD); National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC); and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities and Office for Domestic Social Development.

Policy

In January 2007, several CASE partners (USCCB, Catholic Charities USA, the Catholic Health Association of the United States, Catholic Health Initiatives, Catholic Healthcare West, National Catholic Partnership on Disability, National Catholic Rural Life Conference and National Council of Catholic Women) signed a joint letter to the leadership of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees expressing their support for additional funding in FY 2007 for implementation of the National Children's Study, a longitudinal study of 100,000 pregnant women whose children will be followed from before birth until age 21. The study, which is being coordinated by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, will provide information about environmental threats that may affect children's physical, mental, emotional and developmental health.

In the past, USCCB and CASE partners have supported other legislative initiatives aimed at protecting human health and addressing the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on low-income and vulnerable. We have addressed federal regulations and legislation that support our country's ability to track chronic illnesses that might be connected to environmental influences (nationwide health tracking); have called for the reduction of mercury pollution; and a ban on testing of pesticides on children and pregnant women in both legislation and regulation.

Catholic organizations joined others in successfully urging the EPA to ensure the protection of pregnant women and children from unnecessary and potentially harmful testing of pesticides. According to the EPA, "Under the new rules all third-party intentional dosing research on pesticides involving pregnant or nursing women and children intended for submission to EPA is banned, and EPA will neither conduct nor support any intentional dosing studies that involve pregnant or nursing women or children for all substances EPA regulates."

USCCB POSITION

As Catholics, we are called to care for God's gift of creation and to protect the most vulnerable among us. Caught in a spiral of poverty and environmental degradation, the poor and the powerless bear a disproportionate burden of the effects of environmental problems, as their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted, to be near toxic waste dumps, or to suffer from water contamination.

In the face of these challenges, the Catholic community is an integral part of learning more, caring more, and doing more about the environment and the threats to it, and to our children. "For generations, the Catholic community has reached out to children... We have defended their right to life itself and their right to live with dignity, to realize the bright promise and opportunity of childhood. Now we renew this commitment and build on it. We seek to bring new hope and concrete help to a generation of children at risk." (*Putting Children and Families First*, p. 17).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

✓ Urge Congress to support initiatives, including research, that protect children and our communities from environmental harm.

✓ Urge Congress and the Administration to protect children from exposure to harmful toxins such as lead and mercury.

✓ Urge your local and state authorities to fund initiatives intended to assist public and private schools in providing an environment free of health hazards.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact Roxana U. Barillas at (202) 541-3445, rbarillas@usccb.org; or visit www.usccb.org/case

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Background on The Death Penalty
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The number of people facing execution in the United States is the smallest since the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment 30 years ago. Only 14 U.S. states carried out executions in 2006, and only six states (Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia) conducted more than one execution. The total number of executions in 2006 was 53, down 12% from 2005 and 46% fewer than in 1999. The number of people on the nation's death rows decreased for the fifth consecutive year (to 3,366), after 25 years of steady increases. According to a May 2006 Gallup poll, more Americans now support life sentence without parole as punishment for murder rather than the death penalty.

Executions have been halted in at least eight states and the federal system pending study of charges that the lethal injections are causing needless, excruciating pain. The courts are reviewing evidence in light of the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The Supreme Court has not yet reviewed a lethal injection case, but the Court did decide in a Florida case, *Hill v. McDounough*, that challenges to lethal injection procedures can be brought under civil rights law.

The citizens of Illinois are in the seventh year of a moratorium on all executions, North Carolina and California have begun legislative studies of their death penalty system. And New York has yet to reinstate its overturned death penalty statute.

The New Jersey Death Penalty Study Commission recommended that New Jersey abolish its death penalty. The commission's January 2, 2007 report found "no compelling evidence" that capital punishment serves a legitimate purpose. The commission also found the death penalty to be "inconsistent with evolving standards of decency," a phrase almost identical to that used by Trenton Bishop John M. Smith when he testified before the commission last July on behalf of the New Jersey Catholic Conference. New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine's announced "As someone who has long opposed the death penalty, I look forward to working with the legislature" to implement the recommendations.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

A bill in the last Congress that would have streamlined current law and *habeas corpus* procedures in order to speed up the execution process, *The Streamlined Procedures Act of 2005*, (SPA) was not acted upon. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops opposed the bill because it would have dramatically diminished the federal courts' ability to consider *habeas corpus* petitions in death penalty cases, even in cases of actual innocence. The Conference will continue to monitor federal legislation for other efforts to expand the death penalty or undermine the ability of death row inmates to seek review of their cases.

SUPREME COURT ACTION

The U.S. Supreme Court held (5-4) in *Kansas v. March* that the Kansas' death penalty statute, which requires that a death sentence be imposed when a jury finds that the aggravating and mitigating circumstances in a case have equal weight, is constitutional. In *House v. Bell*, the Court ruled 5-3 that a Tennessee inmate could pursue his appeal in federal court because of doubts raised through DNA testing of evidence from his trial.

The Court's sharp division on many death penalty issues was also reflected in the first decision of its new term, *Ayers v. Belmontes*, a 5-4 decision upholding a California death sentence. The dissenters said that the state's interests in carrying out an execution so long after the trial were small compared to the defendant's interests in a reliable proceeding.

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear another death penalty case from Texas (*Panetti v. Quarterman*), this one involving a defendant who may be mentally incompetent. In 1986, the Supreme Court held that it is unconstitutional to execute an inmate who is presently insane. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit ruled that Scott Panetti, who was allowed to defend himself in his Texas trial despite his schizophrenia and 14 stints in mental hospitals, and who says the devil compelled his actions, was aware that he committed a crime and that he was to be punished. The question for the Supreme Court is whether mere awareness of one's acts can be equated with mental competence, or whether the person also needs to rationally understand what is taking place.

Also, The Court has agreed to hear a case regarding the exclusion of capital jurors to its docket this term. The case, *Uttecht v. Brown* involves the removal of a potential juror from a death penalty trial because of the juror's views about capital punishment.

USCCB POSITION

Since 1980, the U.S. Catholic bishops have taken a strong and principled position against the use of the death penalty in the United States. The Catholic Church opposes the use of the death penalty not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes, but for how it diminishes all of us and society as a whole. Last November, the U.S. Catholic Bishops affirmed this position in their statement *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*. This statement complements the efforts of the Catholic Church for many years and is a part of a comprehensive Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty launched in March of 2005. Moreover, Pope John Paul II, in both *The Gospel of Life* and the revised Catechism of the Catholic Church, stated that our society has adequate alternative means today to protect society from violent crime without resorting to capital punishment.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get involved in efforts to restrict, restrain and end the use of the death penalty at the state and federal levels.
- Use the resources and materials available for The Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty (see: www.ccedp.org).

For More Information

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Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on the 2007 Farm Bill
February 2007

ISSUE

For people of faith, food production is unlike any other sector of the economy precisely because it is necessary for life itself. This is the particular lens which shapes our engagement on the Farm Bill, which comes up for renewal every five or six years and sets U.S. policy in a number of key areas:

- Programs in support of certain farm commodity crops
- Food Stamps and emergency food assistance programs
- Conservation programs that promote responsible stewardship of the land
- Investment to promote and stimulate rural development
- Food aid for hungry communities overseas in response to disasters or other causes of food insecurity

Over the next few months, there will be renewed discussion about how U.S. farm policies affect domestic farmers, food producers, and food consumers. The current programs often mismatch needs and resources, leaving out those who need it the most. The changes taking place in U.S. farm communities require that a new Farm Bill support more effectively and fairly those who make our food; build rural communities; and ensure that no one goes hungry.

The new Congress is also facing other challenges due to the changing nature of U.S. agriculture in a global economy, the need for sources of energy that are agriculture-based to address U.S. dependency on oil and the opportunity to promote rural development. Global trade talks around agriculture also seek compliance of U.S. farm programs with international trade rules. As the U.S. seeks to gain access to overseas markets, developing countries are asking the U.S. to cut its agricultural subsidies that, many argue, promote overproduction and harm poor-country farmers.

Half the world's population relies on agriculture to make a living. Most poor or extremely poor people around the globe (i.e. those living on less than \$2 or \$1 per day) live in rural areas, so agriculture is a primary means for alleviating poverty.

Congress must reauthorize the Farm Bill this year. Senate and House Agriculture Committees have signaled they would like to have a bill introduced by the end of August. As Committee hearings on the shape of the next Farm Bill intensify, it will be important for those concerned with poverty to engage in this debate.

BACKGROUND

Federal farm programs began during the Great Depression, when one-quarter of the U.S. population lived on farms. For generations, the federal government has guaranteed minimum prices to farmers and allowed farmers to sell some crops to the federal government when markets were poor. Loan deficiency payments or subsidies for certain commodity crops like corn, wheat, cotton and soybeans are the most common guarantees.

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The reauthorization of the Farm Bill provides an opportunity to reshape the current, broken agricultural policies to build a more just framework that better serves small and moderate-size family farms in the U.S., promotes good stewardship of the land, overcomes hunger here and abroad, and helps vulnerable farmers and their families in developing countries. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen and improve the Food Stamp program, a key part of the fight against hunger in the US, and to strengthen international food aid programs for starving people overseas.

We are working with Catholic partners (National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services) and others, including a religious working group on the Farm Bill, to urge Congress to adopt policies that support domestic farmers, promote rural development, and reduce hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world.

USCCB POSITION

The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and providing a decent life for farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad. A key measure of every agricultural program and legislative initiative is whether it helps the most vulnerable farmers, farmworkers, and their families and whether it contributes to a global food system that provides basic nutrition for all. USCCB support policies and programs that encourage rural development, promoting and maintaining the culture and values of rural communities.

Limited government resources for subsidies and other forms of support should be targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially minority-owned farms, to help them through difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns that destroy crops. Agricultural subsidies often go to a few large producers, while smaller family farms struggle to survive. Rather than simply rewarding production, which can lead to surpluses and falling prices, government resources should reward environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices.

(For I was Hungry And You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Even though there is not yet a specific bill, contact your Senators and Representatives on the Agriculture Committees and urge them to give priority to the following policies in the 2007 Farm Bill:

- Increase investments that combat rural poverty and strengthen rural communities
- Strengthen and expand programs that reduce hunger and improve nutrition in the United States
- Strengthen and increase investment in policies that promote conservation and good stewardship of the land
- Provide transitions for farmers to alternative forms of support that are more equitable and do not distort trade in ways that fuel hunger and poverty
- Protect the health and safety of farmworkers
- Expand research related to alternative and renewable forms of energy
- Provide direct food aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people in other nations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Background on Faith Based Initiative
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ISSUE

Overcoming poverty in our country will require the shared roles and responsibilities of religious groups, community organizations and government. The President's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives proposal has drawn attention to this partnership in bringing attention to and addressing the scandal of so much poverty in a rich nation. Sadly, it has resulted in partisan and ideological conflict rather than a new focus and new resource for overcoming poverty.

In many communities where disinvestment and discrimination exacerbate the problems of addiction, family disintegration, and violence, churches and community-based charities are often the only institutions still there and able to address the pervasive poverty of their neighbors. We must help charities, faith-based or secular, have access to the private and public resources they need to serve the “least of these.” Matt. 25.

BACKGROUND

White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives: The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives takes the lead in promoting, strengthening and expanding grassroots and faith-based services to overcome poverty. There are similar offices at several cabinet agencies, including Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Education, Labor, Agriculture and the State Department’s Agency for International Development. These Offices review policies and programs to remove unnecessary obstacles that may prevent faith-based and community organizations from entering partnerships with the federal government on the same terms as other groups.

Regulatory Actions: The Administration has amended or proposed amending regulations affecting programs at several agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services (Community Services Block Grant, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services) and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Justice, Education and Veterans Affairs. The changes are intended to clarify that religious entities are able to participate in these programs on the same basis as other organizations.

Legislative Actions: On August 17, 2006 the President signed into law H.R. 4, the Pension Protection Act, which included several tax provisions from the Charity Aid, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act. For several years, the bishops’ conference has worked on the CARE Act, which would provide crucial new resources to the faith-based and secular charities that serve our needy brothers and sisters, through \$1.3 billion in new funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), tax-code changes to allow non-itemizers to take a tax deduction for a portion of their charitable contributions (a proposal long supported by the Conference) and creation of a Compassion Capital Fund to provide technical assistance and capacity

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building for faith-based and community organizations. The future of these provisions, none of which were included in H.R. 4, and the rest of the CARE Act, is uncertain in the 110th Congress.

Staff continues to monitor bills affecting the right of religious organizations to be able to hire members of their own communities. Preserving this long-standing ability to hire, recognized in our federal civil rights law, is a continuing priority for the bishops' conference and other Catholic institutions

USCCB POSITION

The USCCB has been supportive of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives proposal because we hope it could put new tools in the hands of those struggling daily to overcome the most difficult problems in our communities: persistent poverty, violence, substance abuse, inadequate housing, and obstacles faced by those entering the job market. We regret that this has led to more ideological conflict than new energy and resources to overcome poverty.

Catholic social teaching and the principle of subsidiarity have long stressed the importance of small and intermediate-sized communities or institutions in exercising moral responsibility. The USCCB supports increased resources for faith-based and community-based mediating institutions that are pursuing creative, responsive and effective solutions with the potential to help people gain independence from violence, addiction and poverty. Faith-based groups should be allowed to participate in federally-funded programs to meet social needs on the same terms as other groups, without changing their fundamental nature or facing discrimination because of their religious identity.

*See **Economic Justice For All, Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform** and USCCB statements on the faith-based initiative. (Go to www.usccb.org/sdwp).*

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Strongly urge your Senators and Representatives to support bills that will encourage additional private giving to charities and provide additional public resources (for example, by increasing Social Services Block Grant funding) for faith-based and community groups that serve low-income families, abused and abandoned children, persons with disabilities, and the frail elderly.
- Urge your Senators and Representatives to preserve the ability of faith-based and community groups to partner with the federal government in serving our neediest citizens, without giving up their identity or existing hiring protections.
- Stay in touch with USCCB for Action Alerts on new bills as they are introduced this year.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Background on Food and Nutrition Programs **February 2007**

ISSUE

In 2005, the number of Americans suffering from hunger or living in homes on the edge of hunger was over 35 million Americans - 12.4 million of them children. Essential federal programs target hunger and food insecurity, generally through partnerships between the federal and state governments and cooperating organizations. They provide children and needy families with access to food, a healthier diet and nutrition education in a manner that also supports American agriculture. Unfortunately every day there continue to be millions of children and adults in our country who go to bed and wake up hungry.

BACKGROUND

Food Stamps: The food stamps program is the first line of defense against hunger. It enables low-income families to buy nutritious food. An average of 26.3 million people participated in the program each month in 2006, according to USDA estimates. The amount of food stamps given is based on an estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for a household. Food stamps are expected to be only a part of a family's food budget. Family resources and income determine eligibility. Both U.S. citizens and some non-citizens are eligible to get food stamps. Adult legal immigrants are eligible only after they have resided in the United States legally for at least five years; legal immigrants who are children or disabled are eligible. There are additional limits on eligibility for adults between 18 and 50 who do not have any dependent children.

Child and Adult Care Food Program: The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides support for children through nutritious school meals and nutrition assistance for day care, after school and summer programs, and homeless shelters. Charitable and non-profit community organizations feeding children in these programs can receive reimbursement for food and meal preparation, as well as training in the nutritional needs of children. The program is administered at the national level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and at the state level through the State Department of Education or Child Nutrition. About 3 million children received nutritious meals and snacks through CACFP programs in 2006 at child care centers and family child care homes across the country.

WIC Program: The Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) improves the health of mothers and their children by providing supplemental foods, nutrition and breast-feeding education, nutrition screening and referrals to other social services. It serves low-income, nutritionally at risk pregnant women; breast-feeding women; mothers for up to 6 months after the birth of an infant; infants and children up to their 5th birthday. WIC is a Federal grant program for which Congress must authorize a specific amount of funds each year. Just over 8 million women and children participated in WIC in 2006.

Food Distribution Programs: Food distribution programs strengthen the nutrition safety net through commodity distribution and other nutrition assistance to low-income families, emergency feeding programs, Indian Reservations, and the elderly. For example, children can receive nutritious food through USDA distribution programs such as the National School Lunch Program, the CACFP and the Summer Food Service Program. Through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the USDA makes commodity foods available to food banks and soup kitchens through states and local agencies, allowing low-income needy people, including

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elderly people, to receive emergency food and nutrition assistance at no cost.

USCCB POSITION

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the bishops reiterated that a primary goal of food and agricultural policy should be providing basic food and nutrition for all. In *Food Policy in a Hungry World*, the bishops called for strengthening the domestic food assistance programs to ensure that no one in America goes hungry or suffers malnutrition. "When the economy fails to provide the jobs and income necessary to prevent hunger and malnutrition, the various local, state, and national food assistance programs must be funded and expanded to provide food to all in need."

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Support Funding for Improvements to the Food Stamp Program: Congress must reauthorize the Food Stamps Program as part of the 2007 Farm Bill reauthorization. *Contact your Senators and Representatives on the Agriculture Committees and urge them to support the strongest possible Nutrition Title in the 2007 Farm Bill – including adjusting the benefit level to reflect increasing food costs and ending the five-year waiting period for adult legal immigrants' eligibility for food stamps.*

Support Full Funding for WIC: Each year, Congress determines in the Agriculture Appropriations bill how much to spend on the WIC program the following year. Work on appropriations bills usually begins early in the year. *Make sure your Senators and Representatives know that you want adequate money set aside in the 2008 Agriculture Appropriations bill so that all the women and children who will be eligible for WIC next year will be able to get assistance.*

Make Sure Low-Income Families Have Access to Food Stamps: Approximately 40 percent of those eligible to receive food stamps are not getting them. Many families leaving welfare do not realize they can get transitional food stamps for five months, and may still be eligible for food stamps after that. Other families are unable to meet the program's administrative requirements. It is important that agencies serving low-income people instruct them that regardless of the states' TANF rules, they may still be entitled to food stamps. And it is important to make sure that legal immigrants know that all children, as well as adults who have been here for five years, are now able to receive food stamps under new eligibility rules. *Work with your local agencies that serve low-income families to be sure that they inform these families of their potential eligibility for food stamps even if they have exhausted their TANF benefits. Continue to call for program simplification and outreach efforts to ensure that eligible families receive food stamps.*

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**Office of
Domestic
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The
Catholic Health
Association
Of the United States

**Catholic
Charities
USA**



Background on State Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization

February 2007

ISSUE

Children are among the weakest and most vulnerable members of our society; their well-being should be our first priority. Access to health care is essential to protect the health and well being of children. As Pope John Paul II said in *Familiaris Consortio*, "in the Christian view, our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord himself." The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) plays an important role in ensuring that low-income children have access to health care coverage. This important program must be reauthorized in 2007.

BACKGROUND

SCHIP was created in 1997 to give states the option to extend health care coverage to low-income children who do not qualify for Medicaid because their family income is too high. Approximately 4 million children are now enrolled in SCHIP. Since SCHIP was enacted, the number of uninsured children has fallen by 2.7 million, despite a growth in child poverty and the decline in the number of children whose families get health care through employment.

SCHIP builds on Medicaid but differs from that program in significant ways. In most states, children in families with incomes up to twice the federal poverty level can qualify for SCHIP (though a few states have somewhat higher or lower eligibility levels). States have more flexibility in SCHIP benefits packages. Like Medicaid, it is a joint federal-state program, administered by the states within broad federal guidelines and funded by state dollars matched by federal dollars. SCHIP however is a capped grant program. The federal government sets aside a fixed amount of funding available each year. The federal funding portion is more generous than under Medicaid, but once the federal limit is reached enrollment of eligible children stops.

The 1997 SCHIP law provided for a total of \$40 billion in federal funding over the first 10 years of the program. Because the cost of health care continues to rise, funding levels will have to be higher just to make sure that states can continue to cover the children currently enrolled in SCHIP. Additional funding will be needed so states can do outreach and enroll children who are not in the program.

Over 8 million children were uninsured in 2005. Almost 75% of those children were eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP but were not enrolled. We know that lack of health insurance has a negative impact on kids' health. Data from the 2005 National Health Interview Survey shows that children without insurance are far more likely to go without the health care they need, from well-children visits to prescriptions to dental and vision services. The SCHIP program is of vital importance to filling the gap in health care among needy children.

OUR POSITION

The Catholic community has consistently worked for access to affordable health care for all that reflects these principles: Respect for Life; Priority Concern for the Poor; Universal Access; Comprehensive Benefits; Pluralism; Quality; Cost Control; and Equitable Financing. Every child, every person, has a basic right to adequate health care. (See USCCB statements *Health and Health Care* and *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform* and *Putting Children and Families First*).

The USCCB, CHA and CCUSA were actively involved in the effort to create expanded health care for low-income children in 1997. After SCHIP was passed, Social Development and World Peace, Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic Health Association developed *The State Children's Health Insurance Program: Guidelines for State Advocates* to help develop coverage of as many insured children as possible and effective outreach efforts to enroll eligible children. CCUSA and CHA have led *Children's Health Matters*, an education and enrollment project to help eligible children get access to SCHIP

RESOURCES

Putting Children and Families First
Health and Health Care: A Pastoral Letter of the American Catholic Bishops
A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your Senators and Representatives to express support for:

- Working towards health care coverage for all children.
- Adequate SCHIP funding so that (1) states can continue to cover the children currently enrolled in the program and (2) all eligible low income children not currently covered can participate in the SCHIP program.
- Making it easier to enroll children in SCHIP and Medicaid.
- Providing states with resources for outreach and education to bring eligible children into the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on the National Housing Trust Fund
February 2007

ISSUE

The lack of affordable housing in our nation threatens the well-being of families and the economic life of our communities. On average, families across the country must earn \$16.31 an hour—more than twice the minimum wage—to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent. A full-time minimum wage worker cannot afford the fair market rent anywhere in the country. The lack of housing in our communities affects economic development—businesses simply will not locate in communities where their workers cannot live.

Housing is a proven economic stimulus. A \$5 billion investment in housing production would initially create hundreds of thousands of new jobs. The initial goal of the National Housing Trust Fund is to build and preserve 1.5 million units of rental housing for the lowest income families over the next 10 years.

A National Housing Trust Fund bill was first introduced in 2003 and had well over 200 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives by 2004. That bill would have established a trust fund that would serve as a source of revenue for the production of new housing, and the preservation or rehabilitation of existing housing that is affordable for low income people. A similar bill will soon be introduced in the 110th Congress.

USCCB POSITION

Catholic Social Teaching has long recognized housing as a basic human right. The Catholic community--through its parishes, diocesan structures, and Catholic Charities agencies--is one of the largest providers of shelter in the nation. Since the late 1960's, the federal government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development has solicited, encouraged, and funded a variety of Church sponsored housing--particularly senior housing, transitional housing, homeless shelters, and some family units.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has written to Congress to support the creation of a National Housing Trust Fund as “a genuine opportunity to let the American people know that the shelter needs of low-income families are a national priority.” And to “demonstrate how vitally important housing is to the well-being of families and our communities.”

ACTION

Contact your Representative and Senators and urge them to co-sponsor The National Housing Trust Fund. Members of Congress need to hear from people in local communities about the need to provide every family with access to affordable housing.

For more information:

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Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Immigration Reform
February 2007

Issue

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, there are currently 11-12 million undocumented persons residing in the United States. Each year, another 300,000 to 500,000 undocumented persons arrive in the United States by either crossing the U.S.-Mexico border or by staying in the country beyond the expiration of their visa. The large majority of the undocumented population works in vital industries important to the U.S. economy, including agriculture, construction, and service industries. Because of their undocumented status, these workers often experience exploitation in the workplace and other forms of discrimination. Because of a lack of available employment and family-based visas in the U.S. immigration system, many are forced to cross the border with unscrupulous smugglers in dangerous conditions. Since 1993, more than 2800 migrants have perished in the deserts of the American Southwest.

Background

Since 1993, the U.S. government has spent approximately \$25 billion on border enforcement initiatives and has tripled the number of Border Patrol agents along the U.S.-Mexico border. During the same period, the number of undocumented persons in the country has almost doubled and the rate of migrant deaths in the desert has nearly tripled. Clearly, a more comprehensive approach to the immigration crisis in our nation is needed.

In May of last year, President George W. Bush announced his support for comprehensive immigration reform. During the 109th Congress, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, an enforcement-only bill which included many overly broad and punitive provisions targeted toward both legal and illegal immigrants. The U.S. Senate passed S. 2611, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, which included many elements supported by the U.S. bishops. USCCB opposed H.R. 4437 and called S. 2611 a “step in the right direction.” Both bills died upon adjournment of the 109th Congress.

It is expected that the U.S. Senate will begin debating new legislation sometime in March and that the House of Representatives will consider legislation sometime in the summer months.

USCCB Position

In January, 2003, the U.S. Catholic bishops outlined principles for comprehensive immigration reform in their pastoral statement, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. They stated that any just immigration reform proposal should address the root causes of migration, such as global poverty, and should include the following elements:

- 1). a broad-based legalization of the undocumented;
- 2). a future worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers

- 3). changes to the family-based immigration system to reduce waiting times for family reunification
- 4). restoration of due process for immigrants

Earned Legalization: An earned legalization program with a path to citizenship would require undocumented workers to work for several years, take English courses, and pay a fine in order to participate in the program. Such a program would help stabilize the workforce, promote family unity, and bring a large population “out of the shadows,” as members of their communities.

Future Worker Program: A worker program to permit foreign-born workers to enter the country safely and legally would help reduce illegal immigration and the loss of life in the American desert. Any program should include workplace protections, living wage levels, safeguards against the displacement of U.S. workers, and family unity.

Family-based immigration reform: It currently takes years for family members to be reunited through the family-based legal immigration system. This leads to family breakdown and, in some cases, illegal immigration. Changes in the family-based immigration should be made to increase the number of family visas available and reduce family reunification waiting times.

Restoration of due process rights: Due process rights taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) should be restored, particularly the elimination of 3 and 10 year bars and the use of judicial discretion in deportation proceedings.

Addressing Root Causes: Congress should examine the root causes of migration, such as wage inequities and the lack of job opportunities in sending countries, and seek long-term solutions in areas of development, debt, and trade. The antidote to the problem of illegal immigration is sustainable economic development in sending countries. In an ideal world, migration should be driven by choice, not necessity.

Enforcement: By replacing illegal migration with legal migration, law enforcement will be better able to focus upon those who truly threaten public safety: drug and human traffickers, smugglers, and would-be terrorists. Any enforcement measures must be targeted, proportional, and humane.

What You Can Do

- Contact your Senators and Representatives and ask them to support a comprehensive immigration reform bill consistent with the principles outlined by the U.S. bishops.
- Look for more information on the *Justice for Immigrants* website, www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

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Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Minimum Wage
February 2007

ISSUE

In the last ten years, the value of the minimum wage eroded to its lowest point since 1955. The value of the current minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour, adjusted for inflation, is less than one-third the average hourly wage. By the time of the Social Ministry Gathering in February 2007, Congress may have passed, and the President signed into law, the "Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007" raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 over two years. The next step for advocates for low paid workers is to seek an indexed minimum wage. Indexing the minimum wage would help workers make ends meet and would also regularize small, gradual wage increases that businesses could anticipate and build into their business plan.

Reasons to Index the Minimum Wage

- The gradual erosion of and the very few increases in the minimum wage over the last fifty years demonstrates the need to index the minimum wage to an economic scale that will help workers get a decent wage. The steady erosion of the minimum wage takes a toll on those who rely on the minimum wage for their sustenance. In addition, uncertainty in wages can make planning difficult for businesses. Indexing the minimum wage assures that low-paid workers do not lose ground in the economy—ground they can ill-afford to lose—and it offers their employers a predictable wage standard.
- Indexing the minimum wage allows workers to keep up with economic change. For example, if the minimum wage is \$6.00 per hour and inflation goes up 3%, an indexed minimum wage could go up by 3% to \$6.18 per hour. That \$6.18 buys the same amount as \$6.00 did the year before. In terms of purchasing power and quality of life, the minimum wage has simply maintained its purchasing power.

Ten states that now have an indexed minimum wage, four -- Washington, Oregon, Vermont, and Florida --for a long enough period to measure the results. None of these four states with experience have had adverse effects predicted by opponents. For example, in Washington State during the most recent recession, while the number of high-wage manufacturing jobs declined, the number of low-wage jobs increased. Nor have annual adjustments seemed to fuel inflation. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics data show a decline in the consumer price indexes in Washington and Oregon relative to the national inflation rate after the states began indexing their minimum wages. (See studies at <http://eoionline.com/MinimumWage> and http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_bp150).

Since first enacted in 1938, the minimum wage has fluctuated relative to wages and prices. Both low-wage workers and their employers would benefit if the cycle of declining purchasing power and rare but significant increases could be eliminated. The nation could help ensure that the

wages of low paid workers do not decline over time, while offering employers a predictable change in wages that they could anticipate.

USCCB POSITION

Work has a special place in Catholic social thought: work is more than just a job; it is a reflection of our human dignity, and a way to contribute to the common good. Most importantly, it is the ordinary way people meet their material needs and community obligations. In Catholic teaching, the principle of a living wage has long been integral to our understanding of human work. Wages must be adequate for workers to provide for themselves and their families. Although the minimum wage is not truly a living wage, the Catholic bishops have supported increasing the minimum wage over the decades. The minimum wage needs to be raised to help restore its purchasing power, not just for the goods and services one can buy but for the self-esteem and self-worth it affords the worker. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has consistently supported legislation that would increase the minimum wage and has urged Congress to raise the minimum wage in a timely and meaningful way. Indexing the minimum wage is a needed step towards fairness and economic justice

Action

- Urge Members of Congress to support the "Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007," raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 over two years.
- Ask your Senators and Representatives to consider proposals to index the minimum wage.
- Watch the USCCB/SDWP website and ALERT on Minimum Wage activity in Congress.

For More Information

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Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Paid Sick Leave
February 2007

ISSUE

Contrary to popular belief, not all workers have *paid* sick leave to care for themselves or their families when they are ill. With the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act over ten years ago, most full-time workers have up to 12 weeks a year of a combination of **unpaid family leave** for the birth or adoption of a child; or **unpaid medical leave** such as an employee's own serious illness or that of a child, spouse, or parent. Many full-time workers have *paid* leave that they can use to take time off from work when they or their families are ill. But not all workers have this essential benefit. Almost half (47%) of full-time, private-sector workers have no paid sick days. 76% of low-wage workers have no paid sick leave. A Urban Institute study shows that for working parents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line, 41% have *no paid leave of any kind* (no paid sick leave, no paid vacation, no paid personal days).

A minimum amount of paid sick leave levels the playing field for covered employers and will have no impact on companies that already provide paid sick leave. The costs of losing an employee (advertising for, interviewing and training a replacement) alone can be far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees.

The Healthy Families Act in the last Congress required all employers with at least 15 or more employees to provide 7 days of paid sick leave annually for full-time employees (working at least 30 hours/week or 1500 hours/year), and a pro-rata amount of leave for part-time employees working at least 20 hours/week or 1000 hours/year. Leave could be used to meet an employee's own medical needs or to allow an employee to care for the medical needs of a family member. We expect a similar bill to be introduced soon.

USCCB Position

The Domestic Policy Committee supported the Healthy Families Act of 2005 as a reasonable extension of our efforts to promote family-friendly workplace policies found in *Putting Children and Families First*. Public policy should protect people who have to take time away from their jobs to handle serious family responsibilities. Parents should not have to worry about being penalized for taking care of themselves, a sick child or spouse. Such legislation would not only help family life but would send a message that children and families are high priorities within our society.

Action

Urge Members of Congress to support the Healthy Families Act. Watch the USCCB/SDWP website and ALERTS on paid sick leave activity in the 110th Congress.

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Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Predatory Mortgage Lending
February 2007

Issue

Some unscrupulous lenders target minorities, the elderly and the poor with high priced loans. Predatory mortgage lending, as the name implies, is the practice whereby lenders offer unsuspecting homeowners loans with high interest rates and fees. Predatory practices vary from community to community. Usually these particular lenders or mortgage brokers: charge borrowers excessive, often hidden fees; successively refinance loans (i.e., flipping) at no benefit to the borrower; make loans with little regard to a borrower's ability to repay; and engage in high pressure sales tactics or outright fraud and deception. The population groups that are most affected by these practices include the elderly and low income individuals, African Americans and other minorities.

Background

Predatory lending has received considerable attention in the news media, largely because of the efforts of local and national community and consumer organizations, many supported by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. In response, high profile enforcement actions were taken against some of the more notorious predators and several states have adopted new consumer protection measures. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Treasury Department, the Federal Reserve Board, and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency have all used their regulatory authority to bring additional homeowners under existing consumer protections and to gather more and better data about these practices. The Senate Banking Committee has announced it will hold hearing on the problem and is expected to consider legislation later in this Congress.

USCCB Position

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote to Congress insisting that “Efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and to expand homeownership among low income families are being threatened by abusive lending practices. These practices, termed predatory lending, trap far too many unsophisticated and vulnerable people, often the elderly, into high cost loans that frequently lead to foreclosure after stripping any equity from the home. The Catechism of the Catholic Church condemns this sort of speculation, this usury, as morally illicit.” (2409)

What You Can Do

- Contact your Representative and Senators and urge them to oppose federal preemption of stronger state and local anti-predatory lending laws.
- Also urge them to tighten existing loopholes and provide stronger protections for homeowners who are vulnerable to predatory lenders.

For More Information

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**Office of
Domestic
Social
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**Catholic
Charities
USA**



Background on Welfare Policy: TANF Reauthorization February 2007

ISSUE

Our nation's welfare policies play an important role in serving the common good by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable families among us – the moral measure of any society. In 1996, a new welfare program based on state block grants, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. TANF eliminated the AFDC entitlement to assistance, mandated work as a condition of receiving benefits, imposed time limits and sanctions, focused on family formation issues, and placed most of the control over administering welfare into the hands of the states. In February 2006, the program was reauthorized through September, 2010, with several program changes.

BACKGROUND

Work provisions: The percentage of TANF recipients that must be engaged in specific “work activities” for states to avoid penalties (cuts in the TANF grant) was increased. In order for a state to get credit for work activities performed by a given TANF participant, the participants must work a minimum number of hours per week – 30 hours for most people. Both the list of specific work activities and the number of hours recipients must work each week were unchanged. States are now required to apply these work rules to state-funded welfare programs, as well as federal program.

The changes in the TANF work rules will mean that many states will face immediate and significant increases in the percentage of TANF families that have to meet the hourly work requirements each month, or else face a reduction in the state federal TANF grant. To meet the new requirements, many states may have to create adequate work programs for TANF recipients, but no new resources were provided for this purpose. Other states may feel pressure to reduce caseloads to meet the new requirements, by making it harder for families to get on or stay on TANF.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) was given new authority to set regulations on whether activities qualify as allowable work activities, tracking and reporting on hours worked, and whether to include child-only cases when calculating state work participation rates. HHS published new regulations in June 2006.

Supports for Working Families: For families leaving welfare, the availability of work supports, such as child care, health care, and food stamps, can be a key to making a lasting transition to self-sufficiency. The transitional Medicaid program for families leaving TANF has been extended through June, 2007. Child care

funding was increased by only \$200 million per year, not nearly enough to make sure both TANF recipients and low-income working families have access to needed child care.

Fairness for Legal Immigrants: Legal immigrants continue to face a five-year waiting period before they can apply for TANF. The Catholic community has long advocated for the availability of basic necessities to all those in need, regardless of their race, creed, ethnic origin, or nationality, and we have worked to restore necessary benefit eligibility for legal immigrants.

Marriage and Family Issues: The Catholic community has consistently affirmed the vital importance of marriage for raising children. Children do better economically, emotionally, and spiritually when raised by parents in the context of a stable, healthy marriage. The changes in the TANF work rules are likely to make it harder for two-parent families to receive TANF – they are subject to tougher work rules than single parent families, and states have less flexibility than they used to to create separate programs for two-parent families that do not meet the requirements. The “family cap” – which allows states to deny TANF benefits to children born while their family is receiving assistance, violating both pro-life and social justice principles – remains in the law. On the positive side, there is new funding for programs to support healthy marriages and strong families and for effective fatherhood programs.

USCCB/CCUSA POSITION

USCCB and CCUSA support welfare policies that: Protect human life and dignity; strengthen family life; encourage and reward work; preserve a safety net for the vulnerable; build public/private partnerships to overcome poverty; and invest in human dignity.

ACTION REQUESTED

- As States make changes in TANF rules and programs to comply with the new federal rules, work with community organizations, local advocates and state officials to make sure new policies help, don't hurt, families on TANF.
- Support efforts to increase child care funding.
- Support efforts to bring the rules for two-parent families in line with those for single parent families.
- Continue to work on efforts to make TANF benefits available to all legal immigrants.
- Continue to work at the state and federal level to end the “family cap.”
- Work to improve education and training opportunities for TANF recipients.
- Watch for alerts on the temporary Medicaid assistance and abstinence education programs, which were only extended through June, 2007.

RESOURCES

Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform; Putting Children and Families First ; TANF Reauthorization comments submitted to HHS by SDWP and by CCUSA, at www.usccb.org and www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

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**Office of
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The
Catholic Health
Association
Of the United States

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Background on Health Care for the Uninsured February 2007

ISSUE

The Catholic tradition affirms that health care is a basic right flowing from the sanctity and dignity of human life. Yet millions of Americans continue to go without health care coverage in this, the most prosperous of nations. In 2005, 46.6 million people, -- 15.9% of the population, or almost one out of six -- lacked health insurance. This is the largest number of Americans reported to be without insurance since the Census Bureau began issuing data on the uninsured in 1987, and 1.2 million more than in 2004. The increase in the uninsured is due in large part to the drop in those covered by employer-based plans. The picture is even worse for people in more vulnerable communities: 19.6% of African-Americans, 32.7% of Hispanics, and 33.6% of immigrants do not have health insurance.

BACKGROUND

Why the increase in the uninsured? A sluggish economy and job market contributed to increases in the number of the uninsured in the early 2000s. While both the economy and employment rates are stronger now, the percentage of Americans with employer-sponsored health insurance has continued to decline. Several factors contributed to this: fewer employers offering benefits; increases in premiums making employer coverage unaffordable; and some shift in employment towards smaller firms (which are less likely to offer health insurance) and self-employment. If this trend continues, the number of the uninsured will continue to grow.

Employer-sponsored health insurance premiums continued to rise at a faster rate than overall inflation or wage gains. Premiums increased by 7.7% in 2006 -- while this marks the third year in a row in which growth rate declined compared to the previous year, the cost of health insurance premiums continues to grow faster than the rate of inflation (3.5% in 2006) and workers' earnings (up by 3.8% in 2006). In addition, the percentage of firms offering retiree coverage has declined substantially over time.

Who are the uninsured? By and large, they are working Americans or their family members.

- 8 out of 10 of the uninsured are from working families -- 70% are in families with at least one full-time worker - and more than one-half are in low-wage earning families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- More than 8 million children are uninsured - and more than 80% of them live in households headed by a working adult.

What are the consequences of being uninsured or underinsured? People who lack health insurance are far less likely to receive basic health care services, and are generally in poorer health as a result. They may delay seeking needed medical care and filling prescriptions, or have trouble paying medical bills while meeting other essential needs such as food, housing and utilities. The uninsured receive less preventive care, are diagnosed at more advanced disease stages, and once diagnosed, tend to receive less care. Babies whose mothers are low-income and uninsured are 60% more likely to die in infancy. The Institute of Medicine estimates that 18,000 Americans die unnecessarily each year due to the lack of health insurance coverage.

The prospects for action: Affordable and accessible health care will be a topic of significant national attention in the coming year. States are taking action, too. Massachusetts and Vermont passed laws in 2006 to achieve universal (or nearly universal) coverage as well as addressing cost and quality. California's governor has

announced a comprehensive reform plan, and several states -- including Illinois, Colorado, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico and Washington -- have established commissions to make recommendations for expanding coverage and reforming health care.

At the federal level, reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) will be a major piece of health care legislation this year, and an opportunity to provide the resources needed to extend coverage to the millions of uninsured children (75% of all uninsured children) who are eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP but are not enrolled.

In the State of the Union speech, the President proposed a tax deduction for all health insurance policies, not just employer-provided policies. Other proposals that could be discussed this year include expanding existing federal health programs such as Medicaid and SCHIP; expanding funding for community health centers; and restoring access to SCHIP and Medicaid for legal immigrants.

OUR POSITION

The Catholic community has consistently worked for access to affordable health care for all that reflects these principles: Respect for Life; Priority Concern for the Poor; Universal Access; Comprehensive Benefits; Pluralism; Quality; Cost Control; and Equitable Financing. (See USCCB statements *Health and Health Care* and *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform*).

The Catholic Health Association (CHA), in consultation with the USCCB and others, has put forward its framework for health care reform, *Continuing the Commitment: A Pathway to Health Care Reform* in April 2000. Through its *Covering a Nation* program, CHA is working with Catholic health care providers, other Catholic ministries, and local and national partners to create the momentum for real, sustainable change in our health care delivery and financing systems.

The USCCB has developed a campaign, *Health Care for All*, to inform the Catholic community about the uninsured and Catholic teaching on health care. Working with CHA, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), and other parts of the Catholic community, we hope to help Catholics to advocate for (1) continued public commitment to health care for low income children and families, the elderly, and people with disabilities; and (2) changes in our health care system - from small improvements to major restructuring - that will lead to health care for all.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Contact your Senators and Representatives and urge them to take action to help uninsured Americans, and to start taking steps toward achieving affordable, accessible health care for all by insisting on resources for health care programs in the fiscal 2008 budget plan.
- Take steps to make sure your community is aware that covering the uninsured remains a serious and growing problem. The USCCB and the Catholic Health Association of the United States are participating in a public awareness campaign called *Cover the Uninsured Week*. The week-long series of events from April 23-29, 2007 is intended to increase awareness of the crisis of the uninsured. Check out the USCCB and CHA websites for more information on how to participate in your area.
- Contact USCCB, CHA, CCUSA and other community resources to learn about what bills are active in Congress and whether they will truly help more uninsured people gain health coverage

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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