

## **Federal Healthcare Reform Abortion**

### **Issue**

Catholic Healthcare believes that access to necessary health care is essential to human dignity and is, therefore, a right. Thus, we have long supported healthcare reform that achieves universal health insurance coverage with a special concern for immigrants and the poor, respects human life and dignity, preserves pluralism by respecting conscience rights, and restrains costs while sharing them equitably.

Abortion and human life in relation to Catholic healthcare have manifested themselves, in part, in legislation around conscience rights protections. Conscience clauses are federal and state laws that protect hospitals, pharmacists, physicians, and other health care providers from state discrimination on the basis that they object on moral or religious grounds to providing certain health care services, such as abortion. Catholic and other health care providers support conscience rights laws because without them, they might be compelled by law to provide services to which they morally object, or abandon the provision of health care entirely. The Weldon Amendment is a federal law that provides conscience rights protections for hospitals, physicians, other providers and insurers. In addition to “Weldon” there are three other federal statutes that protect conscience rights, and 46 states, including California and Texas have their own conscience protection laws. However, it should be noted that during the past decade prominent California legislators and other state officials have made repeated, but to date unsuccessful efforts to force Catholic hospitals to provide or otherwise make provision for abortions. These efforts underscore the need for ongoing conscience rights protections at the federal level, including in emerging health care reform legislation.

Recently, the Catholic Health Association of the United States stated that health care reform should not result in an expansion of abortion, and it must maintain conscience protections for health care providers who do not want to participate in abortions or other morally objectionable procedures.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) supports federal health care reform, but Cardinal Rigali, Chair of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities recently stated the bishops’ strong opposition to provisions in the House reform bill that may include abortion coverage in its public insurance option, as well as funding provisions that are not covered by the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion except for the life of the mother, rape and incest.

### **Current Status**

The US House and Senate fiscal year 2010 appropriations bills both maintain the Hyde/Weldon Amendments. Thus, these important federal provisions will remain in effect through next year, when they will need to be reenacted for the following fiscal year. The Catholic health care ministry is advocating that effective conscience rights protections also be included in health reform legislation, and that the bills not include abortion coverage, or use tax dollars to support abortion.

### **SJHS Position**

The System is supportive of health care reform, but believes reform legislation must preserve longstanding federal policies against funding and coverage of abortion; and must include effective provider conscience rights protections.