

INTERFAITH HEALTHCARE COALITION

For Immediate Release: September 6, 2017

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Faith Leaders Call on Congress to Protect Healthcare for Children

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today representatives from 28 national, faith-based organizations [sent a letter](#) to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Senate Finance Committee urging a long-term funding extension for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). If Congress fails to act, CHIP funding will expire and states will begin sending cancellation notices to families.

The letter reads: **“Our scriptures and sacred teachings inspire a special concern for those experiencing vulnerability, such as children. We believe that no family should have to face the terrible decision between putting food on the table, paying rent, or providing health coverage for their child. We see funding CHIP as part of our sacred obligation to care for one another.”**

While children across the nation return to school this month, the clock is ticking to reauthorize funding for the crucial CHIP program, putting continuous healthcare coverage for children at risk. In the House of Representatives, there are just 11 legislative days remaining before the September 30 deadline. This bipartisan program is currently authorized through 2019, so extending funding must remain a commonsense priority for legislators. Faith communities “urge swift action to provide certainty to states, families, and the 8.9 million children who rely on CHIP.”

[The letter can be viewed online.](#) Faith leaders from the Interfaith Healthcare Coalition released the following statements:

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice:

“Congress must not allow the needs of our children to get caught up in partisan politics here in DC. The highly successful and bipartisan Children’s Health Insurance Program must be extended, and people of faith are speaking with one voice to demand swift renewal that protects vulnerable children. It’s a good sign that Congress has scheduled bipartisan hearings this month, but that is not enough. Congress must pass a bill by September 30. The faithful way forward is to renew CHIP without delay. The needs of our children demand it.”

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:

“Jewish tradition teaches that “By the breath of children God sustains the world” (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 119b). Access to health care for all children is a fundamental responsibility of a just society. The Children’s Health Insurance Program has provided health care to millions of kids whose families would have otherwise been unable to afford it. The Reform Movement will work tirelessly to maintain the program’s funding and its strong bipartisan support.”

Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness:

"The Presbyterian Church (USA) strongly supports the urging in the letter to stabilize and increase CHIP funding. Our children are our most precious yet delicate part of the human family. We must do more to protect, nurture and provide for their basic needs. If we fail to do so, we will fail as those responsible for what happens to God's greatest gift to humanity, our children."

Albert Pless, President, American Muslim Health Professionals:

"Our faith teaches us to take care of the young and the elderly. The CHIP program was created with the welfare of children in mind and it would be devastating to backtrack on the huge strides we have made in regards to caring for families and children in need."

Sister Patty Chappell, SNDdeN, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA:

"Health, wholeness, and dignity are human rights which should not be at the mercy of partisan politics. Raising children is daunting enough that parents should not have to worry how to pay for medical expenses when their children need care.

A long term-funding extension for CHIP will, at a minimum, relieve the stress of some parents who want only the best medical care for their children. Your support of this health care bill will go towards restoring the moral voice in Congress that is far too silent at the moment."

Deaconess Darlene DiDomineck, Interim Executive Director, Methodist Federation for Social Action:

"As justice-seeking people of faith we believe protecting the most vulnerable among us is a moral imperative. Providing a healthy start for our children is the responsibility of faithful government. We will faithfully work to ensure all children have access to healthy and whole start in life."

Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, Justice & Peace Policy Fellow, United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries:

"Jesus welcomed all the children to gather around. He would gather them around himself today. And, if a healing touch were needed, Jesus would oblige. We must follow his example and ensure all children have access to affordable, quality healthcare. Reauthorizing funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program helps guarantee the latter. It's also the correct answer to one question: What would Jesus do?"

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church:

"The Children's Health Insurance Program provides critical access to health care for children in low-income families. Denying care to the very people we are called to serve is not only shameful, it is immoral. As Christians, we urge Congress to prioritize reauthorizing CHIP funding so that children are not denied the care they need and deserve."

Sheila Gilbert, President, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, National Council of the United States:

"As Vincentians who actually go into the homes of poor families with children suffering from serious health issues, we see the need, we feel the misery, and we know the value of Federal programs like CHIP. If our children are not healthy, problems multiply and it becomes even harder to break the cycle of poverty. We are so grateful as Vincentians that our nation at large and our elected officials are now understanding the value of programs like CHIP in building a healthy future for all of God's children. Let's quickly renew CHIP and keep the progress going."

Sister Joan Marie Steadman, CSC, Executive Director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious:

"As women of faith, we take seriously the gospel call to care for those in need and we are committed to a faith-filled vision of healthcare that guarantees health and dignity to all, especially to children. Catholic sisters have been serving and healing the children of the United States for almost 300 years. It is critical that Members of Congress enact a long-term funding extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Without legislative action to extend CHIP the lives of millions of our precious children will be put at risk."

Larry Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd:

"CHIP has a proven health record in ensuring that our children have access to needed health care services. We cannot make a better investment than in the health of our children."

Danielle Bonetti, CSJ, Congregational Leadership Team, Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet:

"CHIP is one of the most effective 'safety net programs.' It gives all children an equal opportunity to have a healthy start to life."

Rev. Marie Alford-Harkey, President & CEO, Religious Institute:

"My faith teaches that caring for the most vulnerable members of society is a moral imperative. Children deserve to receive healthcare no matter what their family's income."

Jim Winkler, General Secretary/President, National Council of Churches:

"The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has been a great success. Churches have supported it throughout the past 20 years. Children need health insurance. This should not be a political issue. In fact, support of CHIP has been broadly bipartisan. Please do not use CHIP as a political bargaining tactic."

If you are interested in learning more about our efforts or scheduling interviews with any faith leaders, please contact Ashley Wilson at awilson@networklobby.org or 202-301-7856.

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The Washington Interreligious Staff Community (WISC) is a coalition of faith-based organizations and advocacy offices in Washington, D.C., which work together for a more just, peaceful, and ecologically sustainable world.

September 6, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Chairman Hatch, Ranking Member Wyden, Chairman Walden and Ranking Member Pallone:

We, the undersigned faith organizations and members of the Washington Interreligious Staff Community (WISC), write to urge you to enact a long-term funding extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) as soon as possible. CHIP funding is set to expire on September 30, 2017, and we urge swift action to provide certainty to states, families, and the 8.9 million children who rely on CHIP.

While we come from different faith traditions, we share a moral vision of a health care system that offers health, wholeness, and human dignity for all. Our scriptures and sacred teachings inspire a special concern for those experiencing vulnerability, such as children. We believe that no family should have to face the terrible decision between putting food on the table, paying rent, or providing health coverage for their child. We see funding CHIP as part of our sacred obligation to care for one another.

Since CHIP was created with bipartisan support in 1997, the rate of children without health insurance has fallen from nearly 15% in 1997 to a record-low 5% in 2015.¹ For two decades, the program has provided quality coverage to millions of children in working families whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid and not enough to purchase private health insurance on their own. CHIP provides affordable, age-appropriate health coverage to children and pregnant women who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but who cannot afford to buy private coverage. It offers crucial financial protection for the families of over 2 million children with

¹ Samantha Artiga and Petry Ubri, *Key Issues in Children's Health Coverage*, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, <http://kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/key-issues-in-childrens-health-coverage/>

chronic illnesses, reducing out-of-pocket costs and easing their difficult burden. Without this program, many of these families would be unable to afford health insurance for their children.²

Without swift action to extend funding, many states will soon exhaust their leftover funds for their CHIP programs. This uncertainty is bad for the 8.9 million children enrolled in CHIP who would be at risk of losing their health coverage. To provide certainty and security for families, CHIP funding should be extended as soon as possible. This program is too important in the lives of millions of children and families to be put off until the last moment.

CHIP has enjoyed strong, bipartisan support over the past two decades. Congress last extended CHIP with overwhelming support across the aisle as part of the Medicaid and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015. We urge you to continue this tradition and not let politics interfere with the lives of millions of children and hardworking families. CHIP funding reauthorization must not be used as a vehicle for harmful policies such as cuts to Medicaid or partial repeal of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. To use this must-pass legislation as a bargaining tool for other goals would be irresponsible and immoral.

People of faith throughout the country urge you to continue guiding us toward a moral vision of a U.S. health care system that offers health, wholeness, and human dignity for all because it is inclusive, affordable, accessible, and accountable. It must be a priority to continue the current CHIP program that is working well for states, families, and our nation's children. The faithful way forward is to enact a bipartisan, long-term funding extension of CHIP to provide certainty and security as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

American Muslim Health Professionals
Bread for the World
Center on Conscience & War
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Islamic Society of North America
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Methodist Federation for Social Action
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America
Pax Christi USA
PC(USA) Office of Public Witness

² Michelle Andrews, "CHIP Offers Families With Seriously Ill Kids More Financial Protection Than ACA Plans," Kaiser Health News, <http://khn.org/news/chip-offers-families-with-seriously-ill-kids-more-financial-protection-than-aca-plans/>

Reformed Church in America
Religious Institute
Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
Sisters of the Holy Cross
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, National Council of the United States
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society