

October 3, 2007

Dear Member of Congress,

Our many faith traditions teach us to care for those who are in need of healing, especially children and those in greatest need. The Christian scriptures portray Jesus as a healer who showed particular compassion for the needs of children. The Hebrew scriptures call us to ensure a balm of healing for the poor through the words of the Prophet Jeremiah (8:22) and the Qur'an says of the Lord's ministry: *When I am sick, then He restores me to health* (26:80). We believe we must act in accord with callings of our faith by protecting children, which includes providing for their health and well-being.

We the undersigned religious organizations begin by offering our deepest thanks and appreciation to those Senators and Representatives who have already voted to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Children are a sacred gift and we cannot overstate the value of providing health care to those in greatest need, and SCHIP does just that. We affirm your principled stand on behalf of poor children and urge you continue this commitment by both voting to override President Bush's veto of the SCHIP compromise bill (H.R. 976) and by urging your colleagues to join you in this principled vote.

To those of you who have thus far opposed this bill, we ask you to prayerfully reconsider this decision. By every measure, SCHIP has been a strong bipartisan success. As a program passed by a Democratic President and Republican Congress, with broad support among state governors of both parties, SCHIP participants demonstrate improved health outcomes and performance in school, while overall the program has, in the past 10 years, decreased the number of uninsured children by one-third.

We know there are objections to the passage of this bill. Some claim that this bill would force states to provide coverage for children in families with annual incomes up to \$83,000. According to the non-partisan website factcheck.org, no state would be forced to provide this level of coverage. In fact, current law, which enjoys almost universal bipartisan support, allows coverage at this level *for a family of four*, only with a federal waiver. The SCHIP conference agreement *does not change this*, and any state desiring to provide coverage for these families would *still* be required to get a federal waiver.

What some leaders have described as a "crowd out" problem, we regard as a minimal concern in this legislation. We acknowledge that some children will indeed switch from private insurance to SCHIP, yet the Congressional Budget Office has found no other program that is as effective at minimizing these private to public switches while providing coverage for such a large uninsured population. In fact, of the small population that would switch to government coverage, many would do so precisely because they are struggling to afford the skyrocketing premiums attached to even the most bare bones private coverage, averaging \$12,000 – or 20% of the income – for a family of four at 300% of the poverty level.

The bottom line is that this bill reauthorizes coverage for millions of poor children. SCHIP provides government financed care delivered through public and private services. Far from “government-run healthcare,” this SCHIP reauthorization bill is simply a straightforward and sensible way to cover millions more children who currently are uninsured. We ask you to vote yes for these kids.

Many of your colleagues, such as Senators Grassley, Baucus, and Hatch, have been bipartisan champions of this sensible bill. In fact, Sen. Hatch called the SCHIP agreement “an honest compromise that improves a program that works for America's low-income children.” Asked whether he would vote to override a veto, Sen. Hatch said, “You bet your sweet bippy I will.”

We ask you to join Sen. Hatch and scores of others by voting to override President Bush’s veto and thus guaranteeing health insurance coverage to millions of our nation’s vulnerable children. The health of millions of poor children should not be sacrificed at the tip of the President’s pen. We in the faith community thank you for your prayerful consideration of this upcoming vote.

For more information, please contact Chris Pifer with the American Friends Service Committee at cpifer@afsc.org.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
 Christians for Justice Action
 Conference of Major superiors of Men (CMSM)
 Church Women United
 Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)
 The Episcopal Church
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 The Friends Committee on National Legislation
 The International Parish Nurse Resource Center
 Islamic Society of North America
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs
 Leadership Conference of Women Religious
 Mennonite Central Committee
 National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
 National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
 National Council of Jewish Women
 NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
 Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office
 Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
 United Church of Christ
 United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
 The Witherspoon Society