

INTERFAITH HEALTHCARE COALITION

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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.