

**Washington Interreligious Staff Community Health Care Working Group**

*“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Champion the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9).*

February 3, 2005

Dear Mr. President and Members of Congress,

As people of diverse faith traditions, we share the core value of championing the rights of the poor and needy, including the right to health care. All human beings have the right to safe, affordable and high quality health care, and Medicaid is an important part of our nation’s health care safety net. Therefore, we oppose Medicaid reform proposals that impose a cap on federal Medicaid spending, or eliminate the fundamental guarantee to Medicaid coverage for our nation’s most vulnerable citizens, including low-income children and parents, pregnant women, people with disabilities and senior citizens.

Since 1965, Medicaid has played a crucial role in providing health services to vulnerable populations; the program currently serves over 50 million people, about half of whom are children. A cap on federal funding--whether in the form of an allotment, an allocation or a block grant--would undermine our current federal commitment to populations whose health care needs would not disappear after the capped amount was reached.

Arbitrary limits on federal Medicaid spending would fail to adjust automatically in response to economic recessions, demographic changes, health care inflation or natural disasters. No formula can account for the multitude of factors that affect Medicaid costs at different times in different parts of the country. Moreover, capped federal payments profoundly limit a state’s ability to be innovative in responding to the 45 million people without health insurance in this country. Cutting Medicaid without real reform of the entire health care system will not address the health care crisis faced by our nation.

The religious scriptures of our faith traditions speak with dramatic unanimity on the subject of responsibility to the most vulnerable in society. We believe that every human being is endowed with worth and dignity and created in the image of God. Reducing the deficit by cutting health care services for poor children, elderly sick people and the disabled undermines this dignity and is morally wrong. To ignore the uninsured in our nation, whose numbers are increasing even without the proposed caps on Medicaid, is not only negligent of those individuals, but also a violation of the core values under which our nation was founded.

We in the religious community invite you to join us in advocating for the common good of our country by supporting policies that improve health coverage for all and enhance state flexibility without compromising the health and well-being of our nation’s most vulnerable populations.

Respectfully,

American Baptist Churches USA  
Anabaptist Center for Healthcare Ethics  
The Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies  
Call to Renewal  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office  
Church Women United  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Fellowship of Reconciliation  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office  
Mennonite Health Services Alliance  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Churches USA  
National Council of Jewish Women  
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office  
The Rabbinical Assembly  
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations  
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries  
United Jewish Communities  
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism  
Volunteers of America  
Women of Reform Judaism

cc: Mr. Joshua Bolten, Office of Management and Budget