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Momentum Builds on Health Care Reform Debate

On June 2, President Obama sent a [letter](#) to the U.S. Senate Finance and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairmen outlining the Administration's priorities for health care reform. He expressed his goal for quality, affordable health care for all Americans. Specifically, President Obama stated his support for a health insurance exchange, a public plan option, hardship waivers if coverage is mandated, and deficit neutrality. President Obama said that he wants a health care reform bill ready for his signature by October.

In May, the Senate Finance Committee released three significant policy proposal papers on the delivery, coverage, and financing pieces of health care reform. The proposals outlined in the coverage paper would strengthen health care coverage for the most vulnerable members of our society. The major goals include:

- Expanding affordable coverage to all Americans;
- Fostering a competitive insurance market based on efficiency and quality that does not discriminate against pre-existing conditions;
- Streamlining the process of obtaining health insurance;
- Subsidizing the cost of health care coverage for low to middle-income individuals; and
- Expanding public programs to cover the lowest-income individuals.

The Senate HELP committee met on June 2 to walk through policy details of their health care reform bill. The major goals include:

- Expanding affordable coverage to all Americans;
- Improving value by creating a higher quality, more efficient delivery system;
- Building a new framework to enhance prevention and wellness;
- Creating a durable structure of long term supports and services for seriously disabled Americans;
- Rooting out fraud and abuse in the public and private health systems; and
- Establishing shared responsibility and paying appropriately and fairly for reform.

The Committees are expected to mark up their bills in the next few weeks with the hope of bringing a single bill to the floor before the August recess.

For more information, please contact Kellyann McClain, Policy Analyst, kmcclain@catholiccharitiesusa.org

Paid Leave Legislation Advances in Congress

On May 21, U.S. Senator Edward M Kennedy (D-MA) and Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) introduced the “Healthy Families Act” (S. 1152), legislation that would require most employers to provide up to seven days of paid sick leave for workers. Almost half of private sector workers (43 percent) have no paid sick time, the majority of which are low-income workers. Currently, many workers have to choose between losing a day’s pay to care for themselves or a sick child, or going to work sick. The “Healthy Families Act” would require employers with 15 or more employees to allow all workers to accrue paid sick time, up to seven days annually. Companion legislation (H.R. 2460) was previously introduced in the House on May 19.

On June 4, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation (H.R. 626) that would provide paid parental leave to federal employees. The bill would amend the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for federal employees to provide four weeks of paid leave for the birth of a child, adoption, or the beginning of foster care participation. A companion measure (S. 354) was introduced in the Senate but has been scheduled for floor or committee action.

For more information, please contact Kellyann McClain, Policy Analyst, kmcclain@catholiccharitiesusa.org

House Subcommittee Holds Section 8 Hearing

On June 4, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Financial Services, Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity held a hearing on “The Section 8 Voucher Reform Act”. The hearing was lead by Subcommittee Chair Maxine Waters (D-CA) and focused on collecting responses from various stakeholders on the draft legislation to reform the Section 8 Voucher program.

During the hearing, the Subcommittee Members received comments from affordable housing advocates as well as individuals representing housing authorities. Witnesses outlined many of the programmatic improvements in the draft bill, but also provided several areas for policy improvements. This was the second in a series of hearings that the Subcommittee is holding on Section 8 reform.

On May 21, Shaun Donovan, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provided the Administration’s response to the proposed changes. A copy of Secretary Donovan’s testimony is [available here](#).

For more information on the June 4 witnesses’ testimonies, [go here](#).

For more information, please contact Kellyann McClain, Policy Analyst, kmcclain@catholiccharitiesusa.org

Family-Based Immigration Legislation Introduced

Before the Memorial Day recess, The Reuniting American Families act (S. 1085); a bill to address family-based immigration was introduced in the U.S. Senate. The bill sponsored by Senator Robert Menezes (D-NJ) would ensure that families are reunited in a timely manner by removing the annual cap on the number of visas. This would allow immediate family members to reunite with legal permanent residents sooner and more efficiently. Legislation similar to the Senate proposal was introduced on June 4 in U.S. House of Representatives. The house version sponsored by Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA) includes provisions that would provide marriage-like immigration benefits to same sex relationships. This provision has sparked controversy in the immigration advocacy community.

Given Senator Reid has said that he is opposed to piecemeal approaches to immigration, it is uncertain if the bill will receive consideration in the Senate. Catholic Charities USA continues to work in collaboration with USCCB and other Catholic Partners to support a just and comprehensive immigration reform.

To view USCCB's letters to the Senate and the House, please click [here](#).

For more information, please contact Lucreda Cobbs, Senior Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement, lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Witnesses to Hunger Policy Briefing

On June 2, Children's Health Watch and their project, Witnesses to Hunger, hosted a policy briefing at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center. This included remarks from Representative Chaka Fattah (D-PA).

Representative Fattah is a sponsor of the "State Child Well-Being Research Act of 2009" (H.R. 2558). This bill amends the Social Security Act to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct research on indicators of child well-being. These include: education, social and emotional development, physical and mental health and safety, and family well-being.

Representative James McGovern (D-MA) said that there is lack of strong political will to address hunger and poverty in the United States. Testimony was then heard from three women who have benefited from and struggled with receiving government benefits to help feed their children.

Policy recommendations from the event focused on three areas: nutrition, housing, and health care. Nutrition recommendations called for a simplified application procedure, improved meal quality, especially at schools, an increase in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and child nutrition reauthorization. Housing recommendations included increasing the supply of Housing Choice vouchers and protecting affordable housing, fully funding a renewal of existing housing vouchers, producing and preserving housing for the poorest people, and investing in community development and safety programs. Finally, health care recommendations included improving and expanding Medicaid, ensuring affordability for moderate income families, and increasing funding for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

For more information, please contact Ryan Smith, Policy Analyst, rsmith@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Unemployment Rises to 9.4 Percent

On June 5, the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released the most recent unemployment numbers. In May, a net total of 345,000 jobs were cut. The number of unemployed persons increased by 787,000, bringing the total of unemployed workers to 14.5 million. The national unemployment rate increased to 9.4 percent, up from 8.9 percent in April. Since the start of the recession, 7 million persons have become unemployed. While the unemployment rate is at its highest mark since 1983, May saw the slowest rate of job loss since September, a sign that the sharp economic decline may be abating.

More information on the recent unemployment data is [available here](#).

For more information, please contact Kellyann McClain, Policy Analyst, kmccclain@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Are your Volunteer Jobs Registered?

The web site www.serve.gov was launched as part of the new volunteer initiative of the First Lady and the Corporation for Community and National Service. Registering events and volunteer opportunities is a way to get more people engaged in the work of Catholic Charities.

Over the summer, the President, the First Lady, the Vice President, Mrs. Biden, and all the Cabinet members have been asked that as they travel across the country, they visit volunteer activities that are registered on the webpage. To register an event or to find an opportunity to volunteer, please visit www.serve.gov

For more information, please contact Monica Maggiano, Director, Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America, mmaggiano@catholiccharitiesusa.org

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