



September 23, 2015

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
Texas Capitol
Austin Texas, 78701

Dear Governor:

As the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, we respectfully request that you reconsider the state's position on refusing to expand Medicaid coverage to an estimated 1.3 million uninsured Texans who are caught in a "coverage gap"—earning too much to be eligible for Medicaid, but unable to secure health insurance on their own or through their employer.

We make this appeal guided by our belief that achieving affordable and accessible health care coverage for all stems from God's precepts about the fundamental right to life and dignity. Your own personal commitments to the protection of life reflect those values, but we remind you that our faith recognizes that life is sacred from conception to natural death. Our commitment to care and compassion for the individual extends along that lifespan. Integral to the right of life for every human is the right to basic health care.

As you know, the federal government has offered to subsidize the cost Medicaid expansion for three years, then gradually diminish that subsidy in subsequent years. By rejecting that offer, the state has rejected some \$100 billion of federal funds—essentially returning the very tax dollars we Texans send to Washington—over 10 years to specifically care for the working poor.

Instead, Texas has placed its hopes on renewing the uncompensated care pool under the waiver, which since 2011 has provided nearly \$4 billion annually to "safety-net" hospitals to continue supplemental payments to hospitals for providing uncompensated care while transitioning the state's Medicaid program to managed care. While the waiver has been crucial for Texas' Catholic hospitals, which provide billions of dollars a year in charitable and uncompensated medical care, we also recognize that it was not intended—nor is it sustainable—as a permanent fix to the issue of the uninsured in Texas. In fact, as the expiration of the waiver approaches in September 2016, the federal government has suggested it is at risk because the waiver was to help transition to expanding Medicaid, not to act as a *de facto* alternative.

When Florida recently faced a similar situation, the federal government renewed the waiver for two years at a 50 percent reduction the first year and a 71 percent in the second year. If Texas were to lose uncompensated care funds at the same proportion as Florida, we could see a drop to \$1 billion in federal waiver payments in 2017, to only \$580 million in 2018. This would devastate Texas hospitals, and the clients they serve, that are struggling to meet Medicare cost reductions that were to be offset by the very increased allocations via Medicaid expansion the state has declined.

We are left with a political standoff, with most of the risk being borne by those poor and vulnerable Texans who are least capable of sustaining the burden. Breaking this impasse requires you, as a principled and committed state leader, to achieve some workable compromise. A waiver renewal with the added feature of a coverage plan for uninsured adults would offer the best chance to maximize both federal funding and the state's resources to provide quality health care to our neediest Texans. Negotiating a specific coverage plan with the federal government could allow a "Texas-style" approach that could feature some combination of cost sharing, wellness incentives, free market purchasing assistance, and/or Health Savings Accounts.

Addressing healthcare needs of Texans by providing the right care at the right time in the right places promotes our belief in respecting and upholding the sacred nature of all human life. Advocating for life means advocating for the basic needs of safe and adequate food, water, security, and medical care. Clearly we cannot let over a million Texans suffer or die unnecessarily because of a standoff between the state and the federal governments. We strongly encourage you not to disregard the opportunity we are given to care and heal millions of God's children who are in such dire need of medical care.

Sincerely,

+ Daniel Cardinal DiNardo

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo
Archdiocese of Galveston Houston

+ Patrick J. Zurek

Bishop Patrick J. Zurek S.T.L.
Diocese of Amarillo

+ Joe S. Vásquez

Bishop Joe S. Vásquez
Diocese of Austin

+ Wm. Michael Mulvey

Wm. Michael Mulvey, S.T.L., DD
Diocese of Corpus Christi

+ James Tamayo

Bishop James Tamayo
Diocese of Laredo

+ Plácido Rodríguez, C.M.F.

Bishop Plácido Rodríguez, C.M.F.
Diocese of Lubbock

+ Gustavo

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, M. Sp.S.
Archdiocese of San Antonio

+ Curtis Guillory

Bishop Curtis Guillory, S.V.D.
Diocese of Beaumont

+ Daniel E. Flores

Bishop Daniel E. Flores, S.T.D.
Diocese of Brownsville

+ Kevin Farrell

Bishop Kevin Farrell
Diocese of Dallas

+ Brendan Cahill

Bishop Brendan Cahill
Diocese of Victoria

+ Michael D. Pfeifer

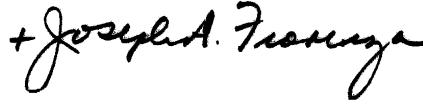
Michael D. Pfeifer, O.M.I., DD
Diocese of San Angelo

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Bishop Joseph E. Strickland
Diocese of Tyler



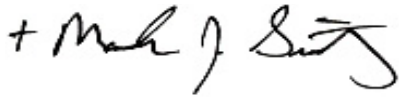
Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza
Archbishop Emeritus



Bishop Michael Sis
Diocese of San Angelo



Bishop Michael Olson
Diocese of Fort Worth



Bishop Michael Seitz
Diocese of El Paso



Bishop Raymundo Pena
Bishop Emeritus

cc: Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick
Speaker Joe Strauss

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