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# Raise healthiest generation, challenges Archbishop

Stating that “if we do what is right, we can take care of all our children and raise the healthiest generation in American history,” Archbishop George Niederauer has urged the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to “include adequate funding in the federal budget to sustain and expand the highly successful State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).”

In a personal letter delivered to the Speaker’s Washington office last week by the George Wesolek, director of the Archdiocese’s Public Policy and Social Concerns Office, the Archbishop advocated “access to affordable health insurance for every child through proven, successful federal-state partnerships” as the “right place to start in tackling the health care challenges facing our country.”

The Archbishop was to join other religious, civic and health care leaders at a public rally yesterday on the plaza of St. Mary’s Cathedral at which a “Report on Children’s Health” was to be released. The report, organizers said, would be presented to Rep. Pelosi at both her district and Washington, D.C. offices.

In his letter, the Archbishop cited a number of statistics that would be echoed in the report, such as “nearly 12,000 children would lose their health insurance in San Francisco alone if SCHIP is not reauthorized” at sufficient levels.

“As Archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, I am proud to say that in San Francisco 98 percent of children have health coverage,” he wrote, “and in San Mateo County we come closer to ensuring that every child has health coverage.”

Describing the powerful California legislator’s staff in Washington as “very supportive of the intent of the letter” from the Archbishop, Wesolek said, “I fully expect the Speaker will support this.”

The letter underscored the importance of “adequate federal funding to cover the 2007 shortfalls in SCHIP funding which put over 600,000 children at risk of losing their health coverage.”

According to Sarah Nolan of the Public Policy and Social Concerns Office, a number of local clerics and religious planned on contributing to yesterday’s gathering including Father Thomas Parenti and Sister Nocy Guan, FdCC, pastor and pastoral associate at San Francisco’s St. Brendan Parish; Father William Justice, archdiocesan vicar for clergy; and Paulist Father Charles Kullman, pastor of Old Cathedral of St. Mary’s Parish.

In addition to Archbishop Niederauer, Gladys Sandin, executive director of the Mission Neighborhood Health Center, was scheduled to address the rally at the Cathedral.

In his letter to Rep. Pelosi the Archbishop cautioned against doing any “harm to the broader Medicaid program which provides essential health care services to the poorest children in the nation.”

“The fate of our children and families is interconnected,” he explained. “We must not pit children from low-income families against those with even lower incomes.”