



## Catholic, other faith leaders urge quick action to expand children's health insurance

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
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WASHINGTON (CNS) – Catholic representatives joined with Jewish and Christian faith leaders in calling for quick action by Congress to fund health insurance coverage for the nation's 9 million uninsured children.

"We speak from a broad range of religious traditions representing many millions of families in urging you to craft SCHIP legislation that will help our nation see a day when no child goes without treatment or relies on an emergency room for his or her primary health care," the leaders said in a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

SCHIP is the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The committee was expected to take up in June the budget resolution that calls for spending \$50 billion over five years to expand the program.

"The faith community worked extraordinarily hard to see that the Senate and House included \$50 billion in new funding in the budget resolution," said the June 7 letter to Baucus and Reid, made public June 12. "We want to see these funds used to support a strong SCHIP reauthorization."

The leaders also called for giving greater flexibility to states under the program and said states should be allowed to expand income-eligibility levels and to cover pregnant women and legally documented immigrant children under their plans.

"States that see covering parents as a way of covering more children should not be undermined," the letter added.

The religious leaders pledged to continue an "unprecedented grass-roots campaign to rally people of faith" around the issue of SCHIP reauthorization.

"Through hundreds of local events, tens of thousands of contacts with members of Congress and scores of Op-Ed pieces and letters to the editor, people of faith are making their voices heard on the need for a strong SCHIP reauthorization," they added.

Catholic leaders signing the letter included Jesuit Father John Baumann, executive director of PICO National Network in Oakland, Calif., a network of faith-based community organizations; Kevin E. Lofton, president and CEO of Catholic Health Initiatives, a Denver-based national health system founded by 12 congregations of women religious; and Good Shepherd Sister Gayle Lwanga Crumbley, national coordinator of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Father Baumann founded PICO, which began in 1972 as the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations but changed its name in 2004 to People Improving Communities through Organizing.

Other signers represented the National Council of Churches, International Council of Community Churches, Armenian Church of America, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Episcopal Church, National Council of Jewish Women, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Methodist Church, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., National Baptist Convention, African Methodist Episcopal Church and American Baptist Women's Ministries.

"The faith community worked hard to win \$50 billion in new funding in the budget resolution," said Father Baumann in a news release. "We expect congressional leaders to use these funds to reach millions of uninsured children in our nation."