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A STATEMENT ON MEDICAID EXPANSION IN LOUISIANA

The **Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops** acknowledges that many of our brothers and sisters within Louisiana continue to be without health care coverage. This reality is stark and deeply troublesome as the number of individuals in such a predicament total in the hundreds of thousands.

In our October 2009 Statement on Health Care Reform, we affirmed church teaching stating that, “health care is not merely a privilege, but a basic human right.” Pope John XXIII included the “right to medical care,” as well as “to be looked after in the event of ill health,” as examples within a discussion of those rights which are “universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable” (*Pacem in Terris*).

We are called by the foundational theme of Catholic Social Teaching, the Life and Dignity of the Human Person, to support measures which protect and promote life while upholding the dignity of all of God’s creation. Accessible, adequate, and affordable health care does just that in ensuring that an individual can live one’s life to her/his fulfillment as a result of being able to care for oneself. Within the context of those who remain uninsured in Louisiana, a second theme – the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable – speaks to our obligation to put the poor first. How the most vulnerable members in our society are faring remains a basic moral test which should therefore guide public policy.

An opportunity exists, through the acceptance of Medicaid expansion made available by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), to enable those without health insurance to be covered justly. The PPACA is not perfect. In fact, it remains quite problematic and a source of frustration and strong objection as we continue to stand in opposition to provisions such as the HHS mandate which contain coverage of abortifacients, sterilizations, and contraceptives. While we will not acquiesce in these objections and continue to voice them to the Obama Administration and the judicial system, the issue of Medicaid expansion has been left to individual states as a means to offer health insurance coverage to even more of its citizens.

The bishops therefore urge Governor Jindal and the Louisiana Legislature to accept Medicaid expansion for the benefit of the common good of Louisiana’s citizens. We realize that there may be other alternative ways in which such coverage could be offered to those who go without. As such, we pray for the prudential judgment of our governor, legislators and all policy makers involved so that hundreds of thousands of our sisters and brothers within Louisiana will have adequate access to health care.

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