



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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July 16, 2009

TO Members of the House Appropriations Committee

Dear Representative:

This week, when you take up the Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2010, you will have an opportunity to help advance a goal that has won approval across the political spectrum: reducing the tragically high number of abortions that continue to take place in our nation.

First, I urge you to retain the appropriations riders on abortion in current law. Chief among these is the **Hyde amendment** against direct federal funding of abortion, which has been in place for over three decades. Studies have shown that abortion rates among low-income women are twice as high if the government promotes abortion by subsidizing it with public funds. The government should not send these women the message that their babies have a lesser right to live just because they are poor.

Equally important is the **Weldon amendment** on the conscience rights of health care providers who decline involvement in abortion. This has been in law since 2004, and President Obama's budget proposal recommends retaining it without change. Recently the President reaffirmed this commitment, saying that he supports "robust" protection for conscience rights. Although he still plans to rescind the regulation by which the Bush administration sought to improve enforcement of the Weldon amendment and other federal laws, President Obama said any new regulation he approves will "certainly not be weaker" than these existing laws (*Washington Post*, July 3). This is no time for Congress to weaken the law that provides the statutory basis for this effort.

Finally, I urge you to retain distinct federal funding for **abstinence education** (now conducted under Title V of TANF, Title XX of the Public Health Service Act and the Community Based Abstinence Education program). Funding for such programs has been a small fraction of the money spent promoting contraceptives to young people. Yet it is precisely in recent years, when the abstinence message has been allowed to compete for public attention and support, that abortion rates have dropped much more quickly among teenagers than adults – due largely to young people's decisions to delay sexual activity. Forcing all federally funded programs to promote a "comprehensive" approach would undermine the abstinence message, by requiring that *all* programs simultaneously promote the misleading message that sexual activity is "safe" for minors when contraceptives are used. The tragic result would be the loss of many effective programs and teachers that help our young people lead enriching lives, and even help save their lives.

Your decisions on this bill can help ensure that our government continues to show respect for our fellow human beings – for innocent unborn children, for their mothers facing so many pressures toward abortion, for caring health professionals working to serve the public with ethical integrity, and for young people exposed to cultural messages that encourage sexual activity for the wrong reasons and at the wrong time in their lives. Especially at a time when so many Americans are hoping for a consensus in support of much-needed health care reform, Congress should not divide our nation by weakening or rescinding such longstanding provisions that serve the public health in an ethically responsible way. I urge you to maintain current law on these issues when you consider the Labor/HHS appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Card. Rigali". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'R'.

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia
Chairman
USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities