

Parishes highlight health care concerns

As Congress prepares to debate health care reform legislation, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien has asked pastors and pastoral life directors throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore to publish information in their bulletins about stances taken by the U.S. bishops on the sanctity of life and conscience rights.

The local effort is part of a national campaign organized by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that sent bulletin inserts to nearly 19,000 parishes across the country.

"Health care reform should be about saving lives, not destroying them," the insert states. It urges readers to contact Senate leaders so they support efforts to "incorporate longstanding policies against abortion funding and in favor of conscience rights" in health reform legislation.

"If these serious concerns are not addressed, the final bill should be opposed," it adds.

The insert highlights an amendment sponsored by Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Mich., which "addresses essential pro-life concerns on abortion funding and conscience rights."

"Help ensure that the rule for the bill allows a vote on the amendment," the insert states. "If these serious concerns are not addressed, the final bill should be opposed."

The insert also directs Catholics to the Web page www.usccb.org/healthcare.

Parishes also were receiving suggested pulpit announcements and petitions in support of this effort.

Bulletin inserts were distributed to dioceses Oct. 29, the day House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and other House leaders unveiled an \$894 billion health care reform bill called the Affordable Health Care for America Act.

The inserts - expected to be placed in parish bulletins in early November - contain information about how Catholics can take specific action by writing, calling, faxing or e-mailing members of Congress to let them know health care reform must explicitly ban abortion coverage.

The House measure combines bills passed by three committees in July into one piece of legislation that members were to begin debating on the House floor in early November. Floor action on the U.S. Senate bill had not yet been announced.

The U.S. bishops have criticized the Senate measure for not explicitly barring funding of abortion coverage. The House bill also does not resolve the issue of abortion coverage.