

To: House Committee on Government Oversight and Accountability  
From: Missouri Catholic Conference  
Re: HB 700 – Medicaid With A Difference  
Date: March 25, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am Msgr. Greg Higley, the Vicar General of the Catholic Diocese of Jefferson City. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Missouri Catholic Conference, which is the public policy agency for the Catholic bishops of Missouri.

First, Mr. Chairman, we wish to commend you for bringing HB 700 forward for the consideration of the Missouri General Assembly. This legislation recognizes that individuals and families have both rights and duties with respect to their healthcare. The legislation also upholds the sanctity of all human life, including a provision that explicitly bars funding of abortions.

Catholic teaching affirms two basic principles that are relevant to the present discussion. The first principle is subsidiarity – the idea that things that can be done on a more personal, family or local level should be done on that level. The second principle calls for solidarity with the least among us and for assistance to the poor and marginalized when they cannot help themselves.

HB 700 seeks to honor both of these important principles. In regards to the principle of subsidiarity, the bill asks people to become active participants in their own healthcare. No government program, including Medicaid, can be effective if people themselves refuse to take some responsibility for their own healthcare.

Toward that end, HB 700 asks people to obtain health coverage through their employer or through an insurance exchange if they can afford it. Premium subsidies are offered for this purpose. There are incentives to encourage people to access health services prudently rather than using emergency rooms for minor illnesses that are best addressed by a family doctor.

Regarding the principle of solidarity, HB 700 ensures health coverage is made available to some of our poorest citizens. At present, in most circumstances, a mother with two children is not eligible for Medicaid health coverage if her annual income exceeds \$4,584. HB 700 raises the eligibility level to the federal poverty line, or \$19,530 annually for that mother with two children.

What will this mean? This will allow many working moms for the first time to qualify for health coverage. At the present time, many of these moms work two or more

jobs and their employer either does not offer a health plan for them or they cannot afford it. HB 700, therefore, will reward work and uphold the dignity of all working people.

HB 700 explicitly prohibits funding of abortions, except to save the life of the mother. The bill also ensures continued robust health coverage for pregnant women and their unborn children. Nothing better demonstrates your foresight, Mr. Chairman, than your insistence that HB 700 include provisions assuring unborn children and their mothers have access to quality prenatal care. This is an investment in our future.

Missouri has an opportunity to transform its Medicaid program while accepting significant federal funds with little cost to the state. These federal funds are absolutely vital if hospitals, especially smaller ones in rural areas, are to continue to serve their local communities.

Most of the public is unaware of the financial crisis facing Missouri's smaller hospitals. Over the next several years, hospitals, including Catholic hospitals, will see major cuts in the federal funds they receive for providing uncompensated care to the indigent. Congress cut these funds under the assumption that Medicaid payments for patients would take up the slack. But if Missouri refuses to expand Medicaid, albeit in its own way, then those federal Medicaid dollars will not be available and some hospitals could close.

Now is the time for Missouri to chart a new path for the delivery of healthcare services in our state. The Missouri Catholic Conference urges you to vote HB 700 "DO PASS."