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CHURCH ALLIANCE

Acting on Behalf of Church Benefits Programs

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April 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Church Alliance, thank you for your leadership in helping faith-based organizations with relief as they navigate the challenges presented by COVID-19. As Americans face job loss and economic challenges as a result of COVID-19, we write to urge Congress to ensure that our faith communities are able to retain access to their employer-provided health care.

Church Alliance

The Church Alliance is an organization composed of thirty-seven church benefit boards, covering mainline and evangelical Protestant denominations, Jewish entities, and Catholic schools and institutions. The boards provide employee benefit plans, including retirement and/or health coverage, to approximately one million clergy, lay workers, and their families, serving over 155,000 churches, synagogues, and religious organizations such as crisis centers, disaster aid organizations, schools, universities, early childhood centers, nursing homes, children's homes, homeless shelters, food banks, and other ministries.

The Significant Impact of COVID-19 on Religious Organizations

Like many nonprofits across the country, churches and religiously-affiliated organizations are stretched to care for the many individuals in need in their communities during this difficult time. In parallel, due to

decreased charitable contributions and other revenues, these organizations are struggling to pay their employees who are ministering to their communities.

During these challenging times, we strongly support efforts to ensure that Americans facing job loss and economic challenges have access to affordable health care coverage during the COVID-19 crisis and, importantly, that our faith communities are able to retain access to their employer-provided health care. In this regard, the Church Alliance is allied with the Alliance to Fight for Health Care (AFHC), a broad stakeholder group committed to helping people retain their health care during the pandemic.

The AFHC recently sent a [letter](#) to Congress urging consideration of “further legislation to further mitigate the disruption caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic,” highlighting proposals to meet critical needs during this crisis. We encourage you to consider these proposals as urgent action is needed. People are losing their coverage now. Specifically, the Church Alliance calls on Congress to act urgently to pass:

- 1) subsidized health insurance continuation coverage for employees who have lost their jobs and that such proposals expressly apply to both ERISA and non-ERISA plans, like church plans;
- 2) funding for employer-provided health plans that are facing significant claims, including church plans; and
- 3) policies that promote health care coverage for all individuals facing job loss and financial crisis.

We must work quickly and together to make sure individuals who lose their job and potentially their employer-sponsored health insurance due to the economic impact of COVID-19 have continued access to affordable health care coverage during this COVID-19 crisis—either through their employer or through federal subsidies to help pay for continued health care coverage premiums.

It is important to be mindful that any such funding used to boost the affordability of coverage will be made to maintain existing coverage—plans that were valid before COVID-19 and will remain so in any post-COVID-19 environment.

Additionally, it is critical that any such proposals be extended to church employees and their families across this country, whose lives may be at risk without an extension of this critical coverage.

We recognize the unique challenges that must be navigated during the legislative process when it comes to enacting health care legislation, but we remain firmly committed to making sure all Americans have access to affordable health care coverage because we know that access to care is essential when it comes to preserving and protecting lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues to church and religious organizations’ employees and their families. We are happy to speak with you and your staff and answer any questions you may have regarding these issues. Please contact Karishma Shah Page,

our Policy Counsel, at (202) 778-9128 or via e-mail at Karishma.Page@klgates.com if you have any questions or wish to discuss any of the information in this letter further.

Sincerely,



James Sanft
Church Alliance Chair



Rev. Jeffrey Thiemann
Church Alliance Vice Chair