President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Spratt
Chair, House Budget Committee
1401 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
Chair, HELP Committee
317 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Christopher Dodd
HELP Committee
448 Russell Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Charlie Rangel
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Democratic Majority Leader
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Chair, House Energy and Commerce Committee
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Chair, House Committee on Education and Labor
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Senate Majority Whip
309 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Clyburn
House Majority Whip
2135 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Sirs and Madam:

We, the undersigned, represent tens of millions of people of faith across our nation. We stand with the Children's Defense Fund in support of health care legislation that assures *real* reform of our broken and inadequate child health system as part of overall health reform for all. Countless children are suffering and dying needlessly every day in our rich nation from causes we can and must prevent without another moment's delay.

We believe that every child's life is sacred and of equal value. We also take seriously the God-given charge, central to each of our religious traditions, to place a special priority on protecting children and those who are vulnerable and most likely to be excluded.

We believe that America's promise, enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, rests on the belief that all men and women and children are created with certain inalienable rights and that health care is such a right.

We believe that every child is entitled to a healthy, fair and safe start in life and the chance to reach healthy and productive adulthood on a level playing field.

We believe that a 50 state lottery of geography and that 50 different sets of rules and valuations of a child's life and health is profoundly unjust. A child is a child wherever they live in America and each deserves a national health safety net.

We believe it is morally and economically indefensible that America, with a $14 trillion GDP, the largest in the world, ranks 1st in the world in millionaires and billionaires, in military expenditures, military exports, and in health expenditures but 16th in maternal mortality, 22nd in low birthweight babies, 23rd in neonatal mortality rates, 27th in infant mortality, worst in adolescent birth rates, and is the only industrialized nation that does not provide prenatal care as a nationally guaranteed protection for its mothers. How many of the 28,000 babies who died in the first year of life in the most recent year could have been saved with prenatal care?

If we compare just Black child health status to children in other nations, 62 nations have lower infant mortality rates including Barbados, Malaysia and Thailand; over 100 nations have lower percentages of low birthweight births including Algeria, Botswana, and Panama; and Black women in the U.S. are more likely to die from complications of pregnancy and child birth than mothers in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. We can and must do better.

We believe it is unjust that children of color face disproportionately greater burdens at every stage of their lives. Two-thirds of uninsured children are children of color. They are more likely than nonwhite children to be born at low birthweight, to die in the first year of life; to be in poor health and suffer sickness; to be hungry and homeless; to drop out of school; and to be sucked into a Cradle to Prison Pipeline and dead end lives rather than be put into a cradle to college and productive work pipeline. That a Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance, a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance, and a Black girl a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in their lifetime is a massive child tragedy and unfolding national catastrophe. Incarceration is becoming the new American apartheid and poor children of color are the fodder.

We believe that the absence of a national health and mental health safety net is a major contributor to the prison pipeline. Undetected and untreated health and mental health problems impede children's school performance and contribute to high dropout and juvenile detention rates and stunted young lives. Thousands of children whose lives were torn apart by Hurricane Katrina are still struggling four years after the disaster with severe health and mental health problems without an adequate and humane response by their nation and states.

We support President Obama's call for health reform for all and his campaign promise of a child health mandate. We agree that our health care system which leaves 47 million Americans without affordable and adequate health coverage is broken and needs fixing now and that escalating health care costs must be controlled. We believe that a focus on prevention in our health care system is crucial to containment of out of control health costs and that investing in healthy children must be a cornerstone of any national health reform plan. Although the Congressional Budget Office does not score prevention, we share Frederick Douglass' belief that "it is easier to raise a healthy child than to repair a broken man." In

addition to it being the morally right thing to do, investing in children is also the economically smart thing to do. Children are the most cost effective investment of any group; it costs less to cover children than any other age group. They constitute over half the Medicaid rolls but less than a quarter of its costs. Diagnosing and treating children's problems early saves lives and dollars. While we call on the CBO to find a way to "score prevention," we know that some of the most important things in life cannot be quantified and should be beyond debate in a decent and sensible nation.

What is a child's life worth? What is a child's health worth? What is a child's spirit, battered by preventable suffering and chronic disease worth? What is a child's hope and ability to learn worth? ***What are the true values of the world's richest nation that is so spiritually poor that it even debates whether it can afford to give all its children the basic right to health care***? Robert Kennedy reminded us that "Our gross national product…if we should judge America by that…does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; nor the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor devotion to our country. It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. It can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans."

Children cannot wait and meeting their health and mental health care needs should not only not be debatable but should be the first and most urgent priority in a decent and sensible nation. Their brains and bones and spirits are being formed right now. Yet ***this day*** 78 babies will die before their first birthday; 928 will be born at low birthweight; 2,224 will be born without health insurance; and 2,367 children will drop out of school, many because they could not see or hear the teacher or sit still due to an undiagnosed attention deficit disorder or mental illness. ***This day***, thousands of children all across America are being inappropriately detained in costly juvenile detention facilities solely because community based mental health services are unavailable. ***Children should not have to be incarcerated to get mental health care. And no child should have to wait until they are 65 to get the health safety net senior citizens rightly enjoy***.

We urge you not to let this moment of great opportunity and responsibility pass. Children only get one chance at childhood, and you may only have this one chance in life to pass comprehensive health reform that will help all children survive and thrive. We urge you not to continue to sacrifice millions of child and youth lives to preventable sickness and death and to a costly prison pipeline that robs America of her greatest resources: future teachers, doctors, scientists, engineers, health workers, educators, Peace Corps volunteers and public servants we need for a strong and healthy future. We will reap what we sow, and if we invest in our children now we will gain adults in the future who are healthy, educated and prepared to lead and compete in our globalizing world.

We call on you to act now with moral sense, common sense, and economic sense to ensure *all* children *real* health reform. The recent CHIP bill was not that reform. It left 5 million children without a health safety net and failed to make the systems reforms that leave 6

of the 9 million children currently eligible for CHIP or Medicaid still unenrolled. We call on you to ensure that children are better and not worse off than they are now. Under the House proposal, it appears that millions of children may be worse off on affordability and benefits when CHIP ends. We adults are charged – as citizens and as religious leaders – to rise to this occasion to ensure that every child will have the health safety net they need to survive, thrive and learn in our rich nation regardless of where they live.

Any health reform proposal for all Americans must ensure that:

- No child is worse off than they are today.
- *All* children are guaranteed affordable health coverage with a national eligibility floor of 300% FPL ($66,150 for a family of four) regardless of where they live and whatever program they are in. If you believe, as we do, that every child's life is of equal value, then our health policies should reflect that belief and end the unjust lottery of geography.
- Children receive all medically necessary services regardless of the program serving them. God did not make two classes of children. Every child should have access to the same range of services when needed. Further, children are not little adults and need health coverage that meets the particular needs of their growing minds and bodies.
- Bureaucratic barriers to getting and keeping children enrolled are eliminated by including automatic enrollment, user-friendly forms, 12-month continuous and presumptive eligibility, removal of asset tests, and a "no wrong door" policy. This alone would ensure that millions of additional children, currently eligible but unenrolled, will get the coverage they need.

As adults, we are responsible for ensuring all our children better lives and a fairer nation than we inherited. We are not meeting that responsibility as more children fall into poverty, drop out of school, become parents too soon, and die or suffer from preventable causes. We can help beginning now by ensuring all children a healthy start in life.

As people of faith, we are called to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves and to reflect God's special concern and priority for children and those who are poor and most vulnerable and excluded. It is a concern that is manifest in each of our religious traditions. The Torah teaches us "You shall not side with the majority as to pervert justice," (Exodus 23:2) and commands "Justice, and only justice shall you pursue." (Deut. 16:20.) The New Testament is marked by stories of healing – especially of children – that marked Jesus' ministry and reminds us "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not just me but the one who sent me." The Qur'an asks, "Why should you not strive in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed? Men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from Thee one who will help!'" (Qur'an 4:75)

Will you be one who will help all our children get a healthy and fair start in life and be able to live and learn and realize their God-given potential at this transformative time in our nation and world?

Hopefully and faithfully,

Bishop Charles Edward Blake, Presiding Bishop, Church of God in Christ

Bishop John Richard Bryant, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Peg Chemberlin, President-Elect, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and Executive Director, Minnesota Council of Churches

Most Rev. Metropolitan Christopher, Primate, Serbian Orthodox Church in North & South America

Ms. Lois Dauway, InterimDeputy General Secretary for Missions Program, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church

Rev. Brenda Girton-Mitchell, Ecumenical Officer, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

Dr. Raymond B. Goldstein, PhD., President, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Bishop William H. Graves, Senior Bishop, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

Ms. Christine M. Laitner, President, The Swedenborgian Church in North America

Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Ph.D., President, Islamic Society of North America

Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary, American Baptist Churches USA

Rabbi Jack Moline, Director of Public Policy, the Rabbinical Assembly

Ms. Harriett Jane Olson, Deputy General Secretary of the Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church

Rev. Gradye Parson, Associate Stated Clerk/Director of Operations, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church USA

Dr. C.C. Robertson, President, National Missionary Baptist Convention of America

Rabbi Marc Schneier, President, The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Executive Vice-President, the Rabbinical Assembly

The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr. William Shaw, President, National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.

Rev. Dr. T. DeWitt Smith, Jr., President, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, National Director, Office for Interfaith & Community Alliances
Islamic Society of North America

Rev. John H. Thomas, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

Dr. Stephen Thurston, President, National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.

Ms. Kathleen Tomlin, Catholic Charities' Office for Social Justice

Bishop George W. C. Walker, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rabbi Steven Wernick, Executive Vice-President, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg, President, Rabbinical Assembly