

**Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services Welcome Passage of PEPFAR
Reauthorization**

\$48 billion, five-year bill will continue to address the scourge of HIV/AIDS

From the USCCB

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) welcome yesterday's passage of a new five-year version of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a \$48 billion five-year commitment that will help alleviate the suffering of some of the world's most vulnerable people.

The House, which earlier passed its own version of the bill, approved the one that came out of the Senate by an 80-16 vote last week. It will now go to the President's desk for his signature.

"USCCB and CRS welcome the bipartisan consensus reflected in this bill that preserves PEPFAR's focus on its foundational goals of saving lives, caring for the infected and the affected, and preventing the spread of deadly disease," said Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace.

Ken Hackett, president of CRS, praised the bill for strengthening PEPFAR programs to include addressing tuberculosis and malaria.

"These two debilitating, often deadly diseases seriously affect poor people in developing countries, especially those with HIV," Hackett said. "We also appreciate a number of new provisions, including those that improve food and nutrition programs—vital components in treating and caring for HIV/AIDS patients as well as supporting the orphans and vulnerable children left in the wake of this disease."

Hackett also singled out parts of the bill that strengthen the healthcare workforce in the affected countries.

"The ever-growing demand for healthcare professionals in HIV and AIDS is exhausting the limited pool of personnel that must also provide all other health care services," Hackett said.

Both the Conference of Bishops and CRS are appreciative of the retention of the “conscience clause,” which will help assure that Catholic and other faith-based organizations are not discriminated against as HIV/AIDS service providers.

“We welcome the retention of abstinence, fidelity and partner reduction, which have proved highly effective in curbing the spread of HIV in many counties, as major components of HIV prevention education,” Bishop Wenski said.

Hackett said the five-year duration of this bill, which continues the initial PEPFAR program without interruption, will help in that fight.

“Programming of HIV and AIDS activities in sub-Saharan Africa requires advanced planning,” he said. “Many local institutions have limited independent resources and are reluctant to make programming decisions without assured funding. The risk of a hiatus in funding, however brief, could disrupt treatment regimens, undermine the credibility of healthcare institutions providing HIV services, and endanger lives.”

Bill O’Keefe, senior director of CRS’ Advocacy Department, said this PEPFAR bill is a shining example of what can be achieved when the House and Senate put aside partisan differences to focus on tackling a critical problem.

“This bill represents years of work by people who often came to the table with differing agendas,” O’Keefe said. “That they were able to reach across those differences and come up with bill means that millions of lives will be saved and improved over the next five years.”