



**The Catholic Diocese  
of Jackson**

237 East Amite Street  
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**Most Reverend Joseph R. Kopacz, D.D.**  
*Bishop of Jackson*



**The Catholic Diocese  
of Biloxi**

1790 Poppo Ferry Road  
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**Most Reverend Louis F. Kihneman, III**  
*Bishop of Biloxi*

**February 24, 2023**

**Dear Statewide and Legislative Leaders:**

We write as the two Catholic Bishops in the State of Mississippi, representing the Diocese of Jackson and Diocese of Biloxi. Together we represent over 120 Catholic Parishes and 100,000 Catholics across the state. We also are writing as members of Working Together Mississippi a coalition of over 14 denominations across the state.

Our faith affirms the value of every human life, and we have supported the Legislature's past actions to protect the lives of unborn children. However, the commitment to life must not end at birth. We believe that access to affordable healthcare is a fundamental human right, one that is necessary for the flourishing of families and communities.

Through our parishes and the work of Catholic Charities in both of our dioceses, we witness the human suffering that is caused by lack of medical care. It is especially heartbreaking when healthcare is out of reach at the precious and vulnerable period when new life is created.

The health of new mothers and children are inextricably linked. Mississippi has the highest rate of infant mortality in the country, while the mortality rate for new mothers is among the highest and is rising sharply. The health of children and the health of their mothers is connected to their mutual access to quality healthcare. Racial disparities are also growing wider. Pregnancy-related deaths are four times more likely among black women than white women in Mississippi. Medical experts have said that two-thirds of these deaths could have been prevented with access to proper healthcare.

The Legislature is currently considering legislation that would extend Medicaid coverage for new mothers to one year after birth. Under current law, most new mothers lose Medicaid coverage after 60 days, before many fatal complications occur. This simple change would save the lives of mothers at a minimal cost to Mississippi taxpayers. We strongly urge the House to hear and pass this legislation with the same bipartisan support that it received in the Senate.

We pray for you as you lead this state and we pray that you will act to protect the life of mothers in this state.

Yours in Christ,

Joseph R. Kopacz  
Bishop of Jackson

Sincerely yours in Christ

Louis F. Kihneman, III  
Bishop of Biloxi