



# CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

February 11, 2020

## **Church Leaders Speak Out: Administration Actions that Affect People in Poverty**

As leaders from all the families of U.S. Christianity, representing church bodies and networks serving more than 100 million Americans, we are concerned about administration action to cut safety net programs that help low-income people. The gospel of God's love for all people moves us to speak together on this issue.

On April 10, 2018, President Trump issued Executive Order 13828, "Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility."<sup>i</sup> It instructed government departments to look for ways to reduce the number of people who depend on help from means-tested programs.

We support the goal of helping Americans move from poverty to financial independence. But some of the administration's policy changes and proposed cuts in funding for low-income programs are likely to add to the hunger, poverty, and economic insecurity which are already far too widespread in our country:

- The Department of Agriculture has proposed three new rules<sup>ii</sup> that could cut SNAP food assistance for 3.7 million people<sup>iii</sup> and eliminate the automatic eligibility of 1 million children to free or reduced-priced school meals.<sup>iv</sup>
- The administration has taken a series of actions to reduce the number of people who get health insurance on the Affordable Health Care exchanges,<sup>v</sup> and the number of people covered by health insurance has dropped by 7 million since the end of 2016.<sup>vi</sup> The administration now wants to allow states to impose work requirements on Medicaid. Courts have ruled that this is inconsistent with the law. But Arkansas moved ahead before the courts acted, and 18,000 people lost health insurance.<sup>vii</sup> If work requirements on Medicaid are implemented nationwide, 1.4 million to 4 million people may lose health insurance.<sup>viii</sup> Finally, the administration has announced a proposed rule change that would allow states to convert into a block grant the federal funding they receive to expand Medicaid coverage.<sup>ix</sup> Over time, block-granting could take health insurance away from many families who live on the edge of poverty.<sup>x</sup>
- The administration has proposed two housing measures that would increase poverty. One would reduce protection from discrimination against people with disabilities, seniors and people of color.<sup>xi</sup> Another<sup>xii</sup> would evict from public housing 100,000 legal immigrants whose families include undocumented people.<sup>xiii</sup>
- The administration has proposed changes in how the poverty line is calculated<sup>xiv</sup> that would, over time, reduce means-tested assistance for millions more people.<sup>xv</sup>

Courts have ruled that many of these changes are inconsistent with the law. But the administration is appealing, and the Supreme Court last month decided to let a new rule that affects immigrants go into effect.<sup>xvi</sup> From now on, immigrants who receive only a small amount of public assistance may be disqualified from ever achieving residency status. Even before this rule went into effect, the threat of it was enough to convince millions of people to forego needed assistance with food or health care.<sup>xvii</sup>

The administration has also restricted opportunities and protection for immigrants, refugees and people of color in other ways, and our nation has neglected humanitarian concerns in other parts of the world.

President Trump yesterday released a budget that proposes even more massive cuts to low-income programs over the next 10 years. As Congress considers and passes FY21 appropriations bills, we ask them to maintain adequately funded safety net programs that provide help and opportunity for our most vulnerable neighbors, both at home and abroad.

Continued growth of the U.S. economy since 2010 has improved job opportunities for many struggling families. But while the stock market has soared, poverty and hunger have declined very gradually.<sup>xviii</sup> Neither the administration nor Congress has taken any steps to address our ballooning federal debt and deficits in order to preserve our nation's long-term economic health.

We can do better. Jesus taught that the peoples of the world will be judged by what we do for the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-46).

As the Circle of Protection, we have been asking all the presidential candidates to make short video statements in answer to the question, "What would you do to provide help and opportunity to hungry and poor people in our country and around the world?" We have worked in a bipartisan way to bring our request to the attention of all the candidates, and eight of them have made statements (see [www.circleofprotection.us](http://www.circleofprotection.us)). We invite President Trump to make a poverty statement and respond to our concerns.

Signed,

Members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee



\* Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World



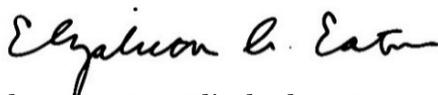
\* Rev. Carlos Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together U.S.A. (in his personal capacity)



The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church



Dr. Mary Nelson, Interim President, Christian Community Development Association



The Most Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



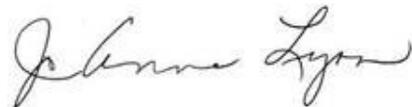
Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation



Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals



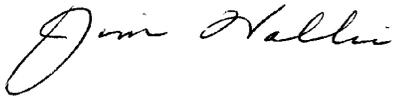
Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition



Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador and General Superintendent Emerita, Wesleyan Church



Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



\* Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder,  
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Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary,  
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\* Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener,  
National African American Clergy Network and  
President, Skinner Leadership Institute

\* *Circle of Protection Steering Committee Co-  
Coordinators are marked with an asterisk*

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-reducing-poverty-america-promoting-opportunity-economic-mobility/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fr-120419>; <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fr-072419>;  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fr-101819>; <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fr-100119>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimated-effect-recent-proposed-changes-snap-regulations/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimated-effect-recent-proposed-changes-snap-regulations/view/full_report)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FNS-2018-0037-16046>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/sabotage-watch-tracking-efforts-to-undermine-the-aca>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/246134/uninsured-rate-rises-four-year-high.aspx>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/state-data-for-medicaid-work-requirements-in-arkansas/>;  
<https://www.cbpp.org/health/states-experiences-confirming-harmful-effects-of-medicaid-work-requirements>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-work-requirements-cant-be-fixed>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/trump-administration-announces-transformative-medicaid-healthy-adult-opportunity>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/health/medicaid-block-grant-trump.html>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/medicaid-block-grant-guidance-will-likely-encourage-states-to-undermine-coverage>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/08/19/2019-17542/huds-implementation-of-the-fair-housing-acts-disparate-impact-standard>; <https://nlihc.org/resource/hud-proposes-major-changes-fair-housing-disparate-impact-rule-join-efforts>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/05/10/2019-09566/housing-and-community-development-act-of-1980-verification-of-eligible-status>; <https://www.nilc.org/2019/07/08/huds-mixed-status-rule-is-the-latest-attack-on-the-immigrant-community/>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://nlihc.org/resource/point-view-hud-mixed-status-immigration-rule-based-lie-nlihc-president-and-ceo-diane>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/05/07/2019-09106/request-for-comment-on-the-consumer-inflation-measures-produced-by-federal-statistical-agencies>;

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/faq-the-trump-administrations-proposal-to-lower-the-federal-poverty>

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/poverty-line-proposal-would-cut-medicaid-medicare-and-premium-tax>

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/27/us/supreme-court-trump-green-cards.html>

<sup>xvii</sup> <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20191008.70483/full/>

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/income-poverty.html>;

[https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err270\\_summary.pdf?v=963.1](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err270_summary.pdf?v=963.1)