



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

November 4, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to you as the steering committee of the Circle of Protection, a coalition of faith leaders who head Christian denominations and organizations. We come from all the main families of U.S. Christianity – Catholic, evangelical Protestant, ecumenical Protestant, the Historic African-American churches, and Latino churches. One thing on which we all agree is that our country's policies should reflect Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 about how leaders should treat "the least of these." We are all created in God's own image, and so we are to treat every person with dignity and respect. Yet God has special concern for those who are poor. In Psalm 113 we are told that God sees people in need and raises them from destitution to equality with the rich and powerful. In advocating alongside people most in need, we are living out our faith.

In the remaining weeks of 2019, we call on members of Congress to enact two top legislative priorities. **We urge you to pass spending bills that prioritize funding for housing assistance and international poverty-focused development assistance. We also urge you to include improvements to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) in any moving tax legislation this year.**

The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019 raised the debt ceiling and prevented scheduled cuts to discretionary spending. As you determine how to allocate those additional dollars, we urge you to prioritize additional funding for low-income housing assistance and international poverty-focused development assistance.

Low-income housing assistance programs help 5 million low-income families afford housing, prevent homelessness, and alleviate housing instability. Just one in four low-income individuals who needs housing assistance gets it. There is already a shortage of 7.2 million affordable and available homes for America's lowest-income households, and an estimated 10,000 public housing units are lost each year due to underfunding and inflation.

For a small investment – **less than 0.5% of the federal budget - poverty-focused development assistance (PFDA)** programs provide humanitarian relief, improved nutrition, better farming techniques and agricultural productivity, safe water and sanitation, access to education and health care—and much more. These programs have supported dramatic reductions in hunger, poverty, and disease. Effective programs in Central America address the poverty and violence that are driving much of the migration to our southern border.

The EITC and CTC are two of America's most effective anti-poverty programs. Combined, they prevent more people from falling into poverty than any other program, aside from Social Security. In 2018, the EITC and CTC prevented 7.9 million people from falling into poverty, including 4.2 million children. These credits reduce poverty, promote work and economic mobility, and increase economic activity in local communities. Research shows that children who receive EITC and CTC do better in school, have higher educational attainment, have better health outcomes, and earn more money as adults.

However, millions of working households and poor children are left out of the EITC and CTC's benefits in whole or in part. Low-income working adults not raising children receive only a small EITC—if any. Their federal tax liability is not offset by the credits, meaning that very poor workers end up owing federal taxes that push them further into poverty. Furthermore, the parents of 26 million kids are either left out entirely of the Child Tax Credit or receive a

much smaller credit because they do not earn enough money. We do not see the moral justification for a low-income child to receive a smaller Child Tax Credit than a child from a wealthy household. **Congress should fix these gaps in the EITC and Child Tax Credit as a part of any upcoming tax legislation that moves through Congress this year.**

We believe budgets are moral documents; they reveal our values and show our priorities. Budgets—both our country’s spending and revenue decisions—show who and what we view as important. The prophet Micah tells us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Our churches are doing their part, operating food pantries, soup kitchens, mentoring programs and other community services. Private charity, however, is not enough. We need you, our elected leaders, to be partners in this effort, fostering greater opportunity for all so we can move toward God’s vision of a world without hunger or poverty.

Sincerely,

Members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee



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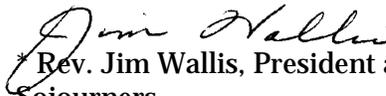
Rebecca Blachly, Director of the Office of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church



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



* Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners



* Rev. Carlos Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together U.S.A.



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Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA



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