



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

The Urgency of Continued COVID Relief and, in particular, Extension of Pandemic EBT Statement by the Circle of Protection Co-Chairs

September 16, 2020

The Circle of Protection is a coalition of church leaders representing the diversity of U.S. Christianity. It includes Latino Churches, Historic Black Churches, Protestants and Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox, Pentecostals and Peace Churches. One thing on which we all agree is that our country's policies should reflect Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 about how we should treat "the least of these."

We urge Congress not to go home without passing a COVID relief package that prioritizes those most in need. With millions of people unemployed, unable to pay rent, and struggling to put food on the table, failure cannot be an option.

We are especially alarmed by the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program's September 30 expiration date. Congress enacted P-EBT in the spring to prevent a spike in child hunger as schools closed and transitioned to remote learning, preventing children from accessing school meals. P-EBT enables parents to buy groceries for school lunches and school breakfasts that their children miss from not being at school.

According to U.S. Census data, an estimated 9 to 17 million children are in households where they aren't getting enough food. The numbers are even more grave for Black and Latino children. More than 40 percent of Black children and more than a third of Latino children live in a household that's behind on rent or mortgage, didn't get enough to eat, or both. Failure to extend the P-EBT program will further exacerbate this crisis, and the consequences will be long-lasting. Children who experience food insecurity face worse developmental, health, and economic outcomes as adults.

All 50 states adopted P-EBT in the spring and have the structure in place to continue delivering benefits this fall. The need remains urgent as remote learning continues in various forms across the country. P-EBT provides states with flexibility to ensure that children who are not consistently getting meals at school can receive critical food assistance.

We call on Congress to extend the P-EBT program.

As we are reminded in Proverbs: "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." (Proverbs 14:31). Neglect of the people in greatest need will lead to an even more deeply divided nation and world. We urge you to act with the urgency and magnitude this crisis requires.

Circle of Protection Steering Committee Co-Chairs

Rev. Eugene Cho, President/CEO, and Rev. David Beckmann, President Emeritus, Bread for the World

Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners

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

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network and President, Skinner Leadership Institute