



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

January 28, 2021

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write to you as the Circle of Protection, a coalition of church and ministry leaders representing the diversity of U.S. Christianity - Latino Churches, Historic Black Churches, Protestants and Evangelicals, Catholics, Orthodox Churches, Pentecostals, and Peace Churches. Together, the church bodies in the Circle of Protection have close to 100 million members. As Christians, we believe that God is especially concerned with the plight of people in poverty – and that a key moral measure of government policies is how they treat those Jesus called “the least of these” (Matthew 25:45). We are convinced that God loves all people and see the intertwined issues of poverty and racism as moral and spiritual issues.

The concurrent crises of a global pandemic, economic recession, and ongoing systemic racism are ravaging the country. The December-passed COVID relief bill was necessary but is a short-term patch. We call on Congress to pass legislation that responds to these crises head-on with a plan that matches the magnitude and urgency of the challenge and addresses the injustices and inequities laid bare by COVID.

We welcome President Biden’s American Rescue Plan as the start of a crucial process with Congress. Many of the priorities in the plan align with the Circle of Protection’s statements and prayers over the past decade.

- We support a multi-pronged initiative to deal with COVID-19, including accelerated and equitably distributed vaccinations, funding to open the schools safely and support childcare, and critically needed aid in support of the health and humanitarian response to this global pandemic in low-income countries.
- We urge that economic relief be focused on the people and communities who have been hardest hit by the COVID-provoked economic crisis, especially communities of color. If further pandemic relief checks are contemplated, they should be focused on those with incomes beneath or near the poverty line. The plan should aid families and low-income workers by increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, nutrition assistance, enhanced unemployment assistance, housing assistance, and aid to enable state, local, and tribal governments to better respond to local needs created by the pandemic.
- The funding for this package should be commensurate with the severity of the crisis and should reverse the tragic spike in child poverty caused by the pandemic.

We urge you to act quickly before enhanced unemployment benefits expire in mid-March. We pray that legislators from both parties will work together and seek common ground. We ask you to act boldly to prevent Congress from having to revisit these same policies just weeks later. The experience of the Great Recession warns us against doing too little or letting up too soon.

As Christians, we are rooted in the love of God in Jesus Christ. As a country, we are called to seek justice and provide relief to those who are suffering. We will be active in advocacy to help pass legislation. We call on Congress to pass legislation based on the American Rescue Plan. As people of faith, we believe that nations will also be judged by how they treat “the least of these.”

John Ashmen, President, Citygate Network

Rev. David Beckmann, President Emeritus, Bread for the World

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

Galen Carey, Vice President of Government Relations, National Association of Evangelicals

Rev. Eugene Cho, President, Bread for the World

Anthony Granado, Vice President, Government Relations, Catholic Charities USA

Rev. Carlos L. Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together

Ralph Middlecamp, President, National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Diane Randall, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Stephen K. Reeves, Associate Coordinator for Advocacy, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Amy Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Adam J. Richardson, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President and Founder, National Latino Evangelical Association

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

Rev. Adam Taylor, President, Sojourners

Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder and Ambassador, Sojourners

Rev. Cecilia Williams, President and CEO, Christian Community Development Association

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, CEO, Skinner Institute, and Co-Convener of the National African American Clergy Network

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary, National Council of Churches