



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

May 24, 2021

Dear President Biden and members of Congress:

We write to you as the Circle of Protection, a coalition of church bodies and related ministries representing the diversity of Christianity in this country - Historic Black Churches, Hispanic Churches, Protestants and Evangelicals, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches, Pentecostals, and Peace Churches. Together, the church bodies in the Circle of Protection have close to 100 million members. We are united across theological, sociological, and political differences by our shared Christian faith and the motivation it inspires to make our nation and world more consistent with the fact that God loves all people, with a special concern for the poor and vulnerable.

We are writing as Congress considers the President's Build Back Better proposals, now including the American Families Plan. We are grateful for the substantial COVID relief legislation of 2020 and 2021. Despite some problems, this historic legislation has been critical for millions of people struggling with the pandemic and its economic fallout. But temporary relief is not enough. This is the moment to strengthen the foundations for human well-being and flourishing for the years ahead. The Hebrew prophets were clear that nations sometimes need to make big changes so that all can thrive, and this is such a time.

We welcome four strategies in the Build Back Better program. First, this year's recovery legislation should support economic recovery and, at the same time, rectify economic and racial injustices and address the climate crisis. Second, we need a substantial, multifaceted investment in struggling families. Our churches are on the frontlines of hardship, providing food, shelter, and health services, but we cannot meet the need without robust partnership from the federal government. We urge you not to exclude our nation's millions of undocumented immigrants from the benefits of this legislation; the pandemic has revealed how many of them are essential workers in our society. Third, we are enthusiastic about investments and policies that would allow low-wage workers to increase their EARNED income. Fourth, in order to make these needed public investments and be fiscally responsible, we support raising taxes on corporations and high-income Americans. This is consistent with Jesus' words of wisdom, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

We do not all agree on everything in the Build Back Better program. Nor does this collective letter mention all the important initiatives it proposes. But we all agree that the following six areas of action are essential:

- 1) Provide robust assistance to low-income families.** This year's temporary improvements in the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit will help struggling workers, support family formation, and very substantially reduce child poverty. These improvements should be made permanent, and undocumented children should be included. We should also expand housing

vouchers to help people with the lowest incomes afford stable housing, invest substantially to preserve and build affordable housing (including tribal housing), and close disparities in home ownership.

- 2) Improve employment opportunities for low-income people.** Making affordable high-speed internet available to all Americans will allow many low-income communities, especially in depressed rural areas, to come alive economically. Rebuilding infrastructure and shifting to a clean-energy economy can provide good jobs for many people. A program of subsidized jobs would connect low-income workers and other workers with significant challenges to gainful employment.
- 3) Invest in the care economy.** Support for child- and elder-care and family leave when needed will improve care and allow more people to hold jobs. The care economy is the infrastructure of our lives.
- 4) Promote education and workforce training.** We believe it would be a good investment to make another four years of education available to all young Americans, and we urge that all students whether they are attending public or religious or minority-serving institutions be treated equitably in any new education funding. Our young people need significant additional financial resources so they are given equal opportunities to participate in this education revolution.
- 5) Help poor countries deal with COVID-19 and its consequences.** In much of the world few people have been vaccinated, the pandemic is raging, economic development has been reversed, and conflict has increased. As long as COVID-19 is unchecked anywhere, variants will emerge and threaten people everywhere. More resources are needed for the equitable distribution of vaccines, humanitarian relief, and renewed progress against malnutrition and poverty.
- 6) These needed investments for the common good should be financed by increasing taxes on corporations and high-income Americans.** The growing chasm in the distribution of wealth in our country runs counter to our loving God's intentions for all of God's children. An estimated 83% of the benefits from the 2017 tax bill will go to the top 1% of the income distribution, and Congress should reverse some of these tax cuts. Our shared conviction on this controversial point is grounded in Scripture. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets criticized the contrast between luxurious homes and neglect of people in need. Jesus warned against the behavior of the wealthy man who "feasted sumptuously every day" while ignoring the misery of Lazarus, the poor man outside his gate.

In the Bible, plagues and other disasters are often taken as a wake-up call from God. The COVID-19 crisis has been revelatory. We are now all more aware of the connections among all people, including people on the margins of our economy and those beyond our borders. With faith that God has high hopes for our nation and the world, we pray for you and your leadership.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

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

John Carr, Director, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University

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

Dr. Iva E. Carruthers PhD, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

Rev. Eugene Cho, President, Bread for the World

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

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

Jo Anne Lyon, Founder, World Hope International

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

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

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

Diane Randall, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

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) in the US and Canada

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