



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

November 19, 2020

Dear Honorable Members of Congress,

We write to you as the steering committee of 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.

As the nation prepares for Thanksgiving and Christmas in the midst of a new surge in COVID-19, we pray that you will come to agreement on FY2021 appropriations legislation and a COVID response package that address the needs of vulnerable people.

As you know, the pandemic death toll continues to rise and hunger is at historically high levels, especially among children. People of color have been hit hardest. We are convinced that God loves all people and see the intertwined issues of poverty and racism as religious issues. We are grateful that leaders of both parties see the need for a COVID relief in the lame duck session. Delay would have severe humanitarian consequences.

We highlight two areas for legislative action:

Expand Nutrition Assistance. We support a temporary 15% increase in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for its lowest-income recipients. SNAP is America's most effective anti-hunger program.

Increase Foreign Aid. More than 100 million people around the world have been driven into extreme poverty this year and extreme hunger has doubled. We won't be able to bring the virus under control as long as it is rampant in low-income countries. Yet less than two-tenths of one percent of Congress' response to this global pandemic has gone to international activities. We urge Congress to provide an additional \$20 billion in international assistance.

We also support other actions that are important to people in need, notably:

Aid to state and local governments. State and local governments are now cutting community services – affecting health care workers, first responders, and teachers. State and local governments also provide help to many desperate people who fail to qualify for federal programs.

Housing. Congress should provide additional funding for homelessness assistance programs, rural low-income housing programs, and emergency rental assistance.

Immigrants. COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and treatment should be available to all who need it, regardless of immigration status, as should other forms of pandemic relief.

Tax credits for low-income workers. Temporary expansions of the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-wage workers not raising children will prevent a dangerous surge in poverty and help stimulate the economy.

We ask you to come together during the lame-duck session with legislation that responds to the urgent needs of this time. This would be a great blessing for many desperate families – and for our unsettled and divided nation.

Sincerely,

Circle of Protection Steering Committee Members

John Ashmen, President, Citygate Network

Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

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

Rev. Eugene Cho, President, and Rev. David Beckmann, President Emeritus, *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

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

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

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

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

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

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, President, and Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder, *Sojourners

Rev. Cecilia J. Williams, President, Christian Community Development Association

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

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

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