



CIRCLE of PROTECTION

October 20, 2021

Dear President Biden and Members of Congress,

We write to you as the Circle of Protection, a coalition of church bodies and ministries representing the diversity of Christianity in this country. Together, the organizations in the Circle of Protection have close to 100 million members.

Even a scaled-back family support budget bill, together with the bipartisan infrastructure bill, could dramatically reduce poverty and racial inequality in America. We believe that God loves all people, with special concern for people who are poor and vulnerable. So as difficult choices are made about the budget bill, we urge you to give priority to investments that will provide help and opportunity to low-income people. There are differences among us on various specifics in the bill, but we are all moved by the Spirit of God to urge that you focus this bill on reducing poverty.

The following provisions in the House bill will be especially impactful in reducing poverty:

- Making the full refundability of the Child Tax Credit to the poorest children permanent and extending the recent improvements in the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Credit for at least four years. A permanently refundable and expanded CTC could cut child poverty almost in half.
- Rental assistance, especially Housing Choice Vouchers and money focused on ending homelessness. Affordable housing is essential to family safety, stability and opportunity.
- We support providing federal health care coverage to people who do not qualify for Medicaid or the Affordable Care Act in the states that have not expanded the Medicaid program. While there is not full agreement among us on how to fix the coverage gap, we all agree on the importance of health care coverage for all low-income people.
- Expanding child care to support working parents and providing paid family and medical leave. These are pro-family, pro-work reforms. Funding for child care and Pre-K education should continue to be provided in a way that does not exclude faith-based providers.

Many people above the poverty line struggle, but there are opportunities to reduce the costs of some programs (notably child care, expanded Medicare benefits, and the Child Tax Credit) with targeted approaches based on income.

Measures to address climate change are important to the future of all our children. Credible action by Congress will empower U.S. negotiators in Glasgow to demand greater action by other countries.

As you weigh painful cuts from what the House bill would do for poor children and families, you could save money by allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices with the pharmaceutical companies.

We also favor minimizing these cuts by increasing taxes on high-income people and corporations. The Bible is clear that God is opposed to the concentration of wealth amid neglected human need and that affluent people have obligations to people in need. The Hebrew prophets (Amos 5, for example) insisted on “justice in the gate” - meaning that political leaders should not give special favors to moneyed interests as judgments about the law are made.

Our nation has an unprecedented opportunity to reduce the poverty and racial inequality that have plagued us for too long. Failure to seize this opportunity would be a moral and spiritual failure. As Christians, we are keenly aware that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ tells us that what we do for the "least of these" reveals how we treat Jesus himself. Thanks partly to past legislation, hunger and poverty have declined this year. This crucial accomplishment must not be lost now but rather become the start of an ongoing improvement in our society.

Signed,

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Rev. David Beckmann, Coordinator, Circle of Protection

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

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

Rev. Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

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

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Rev. Adam Taylor, President, Sojourners

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