



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

November 17, 2021

Dear President Biden and Members of Congress,

We write to you as the Circle of Protection, a coalition of national church bodies and faith-based organizations representing the diversity of Christianity in this country. Our collective influence is far-reaching. A number of the leaders in the Circle oversee thousands of congregations, and the organizations in the Circle together have close to 100 million members. We all agree that our nation should be doing more to provide help and opportunity to people in poverty. This conviction is rooted - not in political ideology - but in religious faith.

We thank God and congratulate you on the bipartisan Infrastructure and Jobs Act, and we are now hoping - praying, with fasting - for prompt action on the anti-poverty provisions contained in the Build Back Better bill and other upcoming legislation.

The Infrastructure and Jobs Act includes important components that will especially benefit low-income people and people of color, partly by expanding opportunities for them to earn more money.

- Public transportation will benefit low-income people and racial minorities who rely on transportation every day.
- High-speed internet access will ensure educational and employment opportunities, stimulating business and jobs in low-income rural and urban communities.
- Replacing lead pipes in homes and schools will end lead poisoning in drinking water and improve health and educational outcomes.
- Good, union jobs for workers will further strengthen the job market and raise income for workers.
- Economic slumps and natural disasters hit low-income workers hardest, and this major, environment-conscious investment in physical infrastructure will contribute to sustainable prosperity for all Americans for decades to come.

As the Build Back Better legislation moves toward final passage, we implore you to protect its poverty-focused features, notably:

- Making the Child Tax Credit available to the poorest families permanently by making it fully refundable, with no work requirements.
- Extending federal health insurance to the two million people who cannot afford health insurance in the states that have not expanded Medicaid. 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.
- Making housing affordable for the lowest income households, including robust support for rental assistance vouchers for hundreds of thousands of families.
- Expanding childcare and Pre-K education, assuring that faith-based providers are not excluded.

For both moral and fiscal reasons, we favor paying for needed public investments by increasing taxes on high-income people and corporations. Our Scriptures teach against concentrations of wealth amid unmet human need and that the rich are obligated to help the poor.

We recognize the difficulty of passing major legislation, especially when people in our country are sharply divided on political issues and the two parties have almost the same number of votes in Congress. But we urge members of Congress from the two parties and from factions within the parties to work together to get the nation's business done, including appropriations decisions for the current fiscal year, notably funding to help address COVID and its consequences among poor and hungry people around the world.

Finally, we urge action on voting rights legislation. The right to vote reflects the Biblical doctrine that every human being is created in the image of God. The right to vote is a test for both democracy and faith. Voting rights are most often obstructed, denied, and made harder for people of color, who are also more likely to be poor. Thus, making voting accessible to all eligible voters is a powerful way to reduce poverty and build a society where all people can flourish.

Signed,

Rev. David Beckmann, Coordinator, Circle of Protection

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

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

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, Chair in Faith and Justice, McCourt School of Public Policy, and Director,
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Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network

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