



# CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

February 28, 2022

To President Biden and Members of Congress,

We write to you as the Circle of Protection, a coalition of national church bodies and related ministries 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 are grateful for progress toward bipartisan agreement and passage of appropriations for the current fiscal year. It is important for Congress to fund the government and to adapt appropriations to current needs. We strongly support the increased funding that the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have proposed for low-income domestic programs, notably for housing and nutrition. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, non-defense discretionary spending has not kept up with inflation and population growth over the last decade. Only one in four of the households who meet the criteria for housing assistance now receive any assistance, leaving 16 million households at risk of eviction and homelessness. Additional funding for nutrition assistance has become even more important now that the improvements to the Child Tax Credit have ended and child hunger has soared.

We want to especially stress the need for additional funding to help poor people around the world deal with COVID, conflict, and increased poverty. The developing world has made wonderful progress against hunger, poverty, and disease over the last generation, thanks partly to strong bipartisan support in Congress for international aid. But COVID and its consequences have been a terrible setback, and the international response has not been commensurate with the challenge. Hundreds of millions of the world's poorest people face reduced income, rising food prices, supply chain problems, and increased disease. Meanwhile, the United States and other high-income countries have been preoccupied with our own problems.

While 55 percent of the world's people are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, the number for low-income countries is 8 percent. The United States is now leading an international effort to make vaccinations available to many more people, and more funding is clearly needed.

Additional humanitarian assistance is also urgently needed - in Afghanistan, Yemen, scores of other countries, and now Europe. The World Food Program reports that 45 million people are currently on the edge of famine.

Our work together as the Circle of Protection has focused mainly on government policies and programs that are important to low-income Americans. But we are struck that very little of the funding Congress has approved to deal with the global pandemic and its consequences has reached beyond our national boundaries.

Helping people in need in our country - and around the world - is the moral thing to do, even in hard times. It is also important to U.S. national security. Poverty and economic frustration are kindling for violence. We can see that clearly in the countries at risk of famine, which are nearly all struggling with violent conflict. It's also clear that Americans are likely to be coping with one variant of COVID-19 after another as long as large populations around the world are without access to vaccines.

We don't know how the bipartisan framework for this year's appropriations or the invasion of Ukraine will affect funding for non-military programs. But we remember that the Hebrew prophets taught that national security depends heavily on care for people in need, and we encourage you to keep that insight in mind as you finalize this year's appropriation legislation.

Signed,

**John Ashmen**, President, Citygate Network

**Rev. Dr. David Beckmann**, Dean's Advisor for Political and Economic Justice, Virginia Theological Seminary; Coordinator, Circle of Protection

**Rev. Eugene Cho**, President, Bread for the World

**Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune**, Chief Operating Officer, National Council of Churches

**Rev. Walter Kim**, President, National Association of Evangelicals

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

**Rev. Carlos Malave**, Coordinator, Latino Christian National Network

**Bridget Moix**, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

**Bishop A.J. Richardson**, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church

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

**Monica Schaap Pierce**, Interim Director, Christians Coming Together

**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**, Inaugural Chair of Faith and Justice, McCourt School of Public Policy, and Founding Director, Center on Faith and Justice, Georgetown University

**Rev. Cecilia J. Williams**, President/CEO, Christian Community Development Association

**Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner**, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network