



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

April 25, 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. 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. Churches are on the frontlines of poverty in communities across the country and around the world.

We want to commend you for the series of major public investments you have negotiated and approved during the pandemic. Most of these bills were passed on a bipartisan basis. When the pandemic began, millions of people lost their jobs, and there were long lines outside food banks across the country. We expected severe increases in poverty. But it is now clear that your bold action reduced hunger and poverty in our country during the pandemic. Tragically, close to a million Americans have died, and all of our lives have been disrupted. But Bureau of Census data indicate reductions of poverty in 2020 and 2021.

Over the coming weeks and months, you will be considering actions that could continue this heartening progress against poverty. This letter conveys our prayerful thoughts about priorities and needed legislation.

First, two sections of the omnibus appropriations bill for the current year still need to be completed:

- It's clearly urgent that Congress finalize supplemental funding for ongoing management of the **COVID 19** pandemic.
- The **international aid** that was discussed in connection with the COVID package is an especially high priority from an ethical and practical perspective. The United States has been providing leadership in an international effort to make COVID vaccinations available to people in poverty around the world, and the President has rightly requested funding to continue this urgent work. We also need immediate supplemental funding for humanitarian assistance. We applaud the humanitarian aid that is being provided to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees and want our nation to show the same leadership in providing aid to historically marginalized populations in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (such as Afghanistan, Yemen, and South Sudan) who are also suffering from conflict and hunger. The disruption of food exports from Ukraine and Russia has increased hunger in many countries and made humanitarian assistance more expensive. Indeed, we are in a world hunger crisis that requires our immediate attention to alleviate suffering.

Second, we were supportive of the powerful social and environmental provisions that were included in last December's reconciliation bill and pray for the negotiation of legislation that can pass Congress. We highlight a few provisions that we consider especially important:

- **Full refundability of the Child Tax Credit (CTC)** reduced child poverty by 30 percent in 2021. How can we fail to find a way to continue this wonderful, proven success? Inflation is hitting low-income families disproportionately hard, and the extension of full refundability would help them cope. Congress certainly should not approve tax breaks for corporations without restoring improvements in the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit. We put this forward as a moral principle.
- **Universal pre-kindergarten, affordable childcare, closing the Medicaid coverage gap, and affordable and fair housing** are also especially important to people in poverty and low-income working households. These investments stabilize families and provide critical assistance that enable many families to work.
- To sustainably fund these initiatives while also reducing our budget deficits, we support **tax increases for corporations and high-income people**. This makes sense in view of the extreme inequality of our country and would allow for deficit reduction in response to inflation. Our unanimity on this controversial point is grounded in our understanding that God calls us to practice mutual generosity so that all may have enough for their daily needs (as St. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 8:9, 13-1).

Finally, we all see **voting rights** as a priority issue, interrelated with economic justice. We support - and encourage you to join with - members of Congress who are working for bipartisan legislation this year that would protect the rights of all voters and prevent the results of elections from being nullified by partisans at the state level or when Congress counts electoral college votes.

Spring is a season of hope. As Christians, we are inspired by the Easter message to hope that God will lead us through the many difficulties that confront us now to a more harmonious and peaceful future. We pray for all of you.

Signed,

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Rev. Eugene Cho, President, Bread for the World

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

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

Rev. Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

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

Rev. Carlos Malavé, Coordinator, Latino Christian National Network

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

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Bishop A.J. Richardson, Senior Bishop, Tenth Episcopal District, African Methodist Episcopal Church

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Rev. Amy Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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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

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