



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

February 27, 2023

Dear President Biden and Members of the 118th Congress,

The Circle of Protection is a coalition of national church bodies and ministries that together include 100 million members. A number of the organizations in the Circle include thousands of congregations. Our churches are on the frontlines of assistance to people in need across the country and around the world, and all of us agree that our government has a moral responsibility to help overcome poverty and foster opportunity for people living in it. These convictions are rooted not in political ideology but in religious faith.

When the pandemic began, we had every reason to expect a sustained surge in hunger and poverty in our country. But that didn't happen, mainly because of the response and recovery bills that Congress approved over the last three years, mostly on a bipartisan basis. These robust investments maintained economic growth and low unemployment. They also provided substantial assistance to low-income families. As a result, our country achieved historic gains against poverty in 2020 and 2021.

The end of some of the programs, notably the expanded Child Tax Credit, has pushed millions of people back into poverty, and some Members of Congress are now calling for deep cuts in social programs. We pray that members of Congress and the administration will work together to keep our government creditworthy without cutting poverty-focused programs.

Any deficit reduction this year should protect programs that provide help and opportunity to people in poverty. Deficit reduction could instead be achieved by increasing taxes for corporations and high-income individuals. Given significant increases in military spending, it will also be important to examine military spending. The priority we assign to reducing poverty and hunger is controversial but reflects values that are based in our Scriptures - passages such as Psalm 20:7 on trusting God rather than iron chariots, Isaiah 2:4 on beating swords into plowshares, and Matthew 25:31-46 about how God judges nations according to their response to people who are hungry and in need.

Finally, we urge Congress to go beyond just maintaining ongoing programs that are important to people in need. We will eagerly support bipartisan collaborations on new and innovative measures to reduce hunger and poverty, notably in the Farm Bill, appropriations bills, and tax policy.

Sincerely,

John Ashmen, President and CEO, CityGate Network

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

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

Rev. Eugene Cho, President and CEO, 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. Carlos Malavé, President, Latino Christian National Network

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

Bridget Moix, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Rev. Ted Penton, SJ, Secretary of Justice and Ecology, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together

Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President and Founder, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

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

Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, President, Sojourners

Rev. Jim Wallis, Inaugural Chair and Founding Director, Center on Faith and Justice at Georgetown University

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