



# CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

March 31, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear President Biden, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker McCarthy, and Leader Jeffries:

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. Our churches are on the frontlines of assistance to people in need across the country and around the world. 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.

We call on you, Mr. President and Members of Congress, to take a strong stance in opposition to cuts in poverty-focused programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and international food aid in the Farm Bill, as well as annually appropriated poverty-focused programs, both domestic and international. There are other ways to reduce deficit spending.

We oppose recent proposals and calls to dramatically expand SNAP's already harsh work requirements. They could mean the loss of SNAP benefits for more than 10 million people, including millions of children and older adults. Beneficiaries would need to report their status (whether they are working, caring for small children, disabled, or elderly) monthly rather than twice a year—a sixfold increase in paperwork, frustration, and possibilities for error. Recent proposals would also impose job requirements on people whose age or childcare responsibilities are barriers to employment, with no provision for training programs that would move people into

jobs at living wages. We affirm the dignity of work and that the best path out of poverty is a job. But taking food away from people has repeatedly proved to be an ineffective way to promote employment.

Such proposals assume that many of the people who receive SNAP lack motivation to work. In fact, 40% of SNAP recipients already work at low wages or live in a household where somebody works. Another 50% are disabled or elderly.

Maintaining domestic and international food assistance is important not just to the recipients but to the health of our nation. Isaiah 32 praises the wise and righteous leader who “rules with justice” (v. 1) and does not “leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied” (v. 6).

We also oppose efforts to impose austere spending caps on non-military discretionary spending. Such caps would squeeze out funding for both domestic and international poverty-focused assistance programs. Any deficit reduction should protect programs that provide help and opportunity to people in poverty.

We appreciate the challenges of governing our large and diverse nation, and we pray for you.

Signed by members of the Circle’s Coordinating Committee:

**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

**Catholic Charities USA**

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

**The Most Rev. Elizabeth Eaton**, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, Office of Ecology and Justice**

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

**Rev. Carlos Malavé**, President, Latino Christian National Network

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

**Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie**, Interim President and General Secretary, National Council of Churches

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

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

**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