



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

February 19, 2025

TO: Secretary of State Marco Rubio
Members of Congress

We, the Circle of Protection, are a coalition of church bodies and related ministries representing the breadth of Christianity in this country—Mainline Protestants and Evangelicals, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches, Pentecostals, Historic Black Churches, Hispanic Churches, and Peace Churches. **Together, the church bodies in the Circle of Protection have close to 100 million members.** We are united across theological, sociological, and political differences by our shared faith in Christ and the motivation it inspires to make our nation and world more consistent with the fact that God loves all people. Our churches across the country are on the front lines of assistance to people in need in both rural and urban America and around the world.

We are reaching out today seeking your attention and immediate assistance. We are facing two significant challenges: being wise stewards of financial resources provided by U.S. taxpayers while also meeting the needs of the most vulnerable populations globally. While it is standard to review spending for waste and abuse, we are deeply concerned that the abrupt pause in international assistance and the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have put the lives of tens of millions of people, including children and infants, at risk.

We therefore urge you to fully resume all poverty-focused international assistance programs during the 90-day review process. The system that allows implementers to draw down funds for approved grants and activities must be restored immediately. It is crucial to support those who are experiencing hunger and in desperate need of relief, as well as to help vulnerable populations around the world climb out of abject poverty.

Illustrative results of the current disruption include:

- Millions of families who rely on life-saving food aid are experiencing severe hunger, as shipping containers filled with perishable food are reportedly being diverted due to the pause.
- In Ethiopia, almost 50,000 women and girls, including some who are pregnant and lactating, are at risk of potentially fatal malnutrition.
- Waivers for lifesaving projects that qualify for exemption from the international aid pause are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

- Even where waivers have been received, implementing partners report that funding requests are not being processed, making it impossible for many aid organizations to restart operations.
- Partner organizations, many of which our congregations support and which provide essential services for hospitals, clinics, and community health programs, are reporting mass confusion and numerous avoidable deaths occurring in communities that benefit from these services due to the stop work orders.
- 6.2 million people served by USAID partners are now unable to get their next packet of lifesaving HIV treatment. Within 2-4 weeks of stopping treatment their HIV viral loads will rebound and severe sickness will start. A 6-month gap in treatment is estimated to cause 296,000 deaths.
- In Niger, a million children will not receive primary health care (including treatment for childhood disease, malnutrition treatment, and immunization for diseases such as measles and polio).
- In the Philippines, 30,000 children no longer have access to critical child protection systems and are exposed to risks of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and recruitment by nonstate armed groups.
- In Turkey, 22,000 people will lose shelter and protection from violence, leaving them at the mercy of extreme weather and hunger.

We are grounded in Christian faith. Jesus identified with people in need - people who are hungry, thirsty, or in need of medical care (Matthew 25). The Bible is clear that God loves and invites us to care about people all around the world. We pray that God will guide your decision-making on this issue.

Dr. Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Rev. Dr. David Beckmann, Dean's Advisor, Virginia Theological Seminary; Coordinator, Circle of Protection

John A. Berry, President, The U.S. Society of St. Vincent De Paul

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

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

Rev. Chris Kellerman, S.J., Secretary of Justice and Ecology, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

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

Silas Kulkarni, Director of Strategy and Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, President, National Council of Churches

Rev. Carlos Malavé, President, Latino Christian National Network

Bridget Moix, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

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

**Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor and President, Obra Hispanica, Christian Church
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Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, President, Sojourners

**Rev. Jim Wallis, Inaugural Chair and Founding Director, Center on Faith and Justice at
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**Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network;
President, Skinner Leadership Institute**