



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

September 6, 2023

Dear President Biden and Members of Congress,

Jesus identified with people in need—people who are hungry or thirsty, strangers, people who can't afford proper clothes, and prisoners (Matthew 25). The diverse churches and ministries in the Circle of Protection are working on the frontlines of human need, and we are asking our nation's leaders to give priority to people in need.

This letter is about poverty-important decisions that Congress and the President will be considering in FY2024 appropriations, the Farm Bill, and possible tax legislation.

The Biden-McCarthy compromise imposed limits on **FY2024 appropriations**. It froze non-defense discretionary spending at its FY2023 level, without any adjustment for inflation or need. The House is aiming to reduce non-defense spending further. These constraints have led to proposed cuts in a number of poverty-important programs. The Circle of Protection opposes cutting programs that help people living in poverty, and we want to highlight the impact of the proposed funding cuts to WIC and international aid.

WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) has long enjoyed broad bipartisan support. It has proven effective in reducing the incidence of premature births, reducing health care costs, and providing American children a strong start in life. More of the women and children who are eligible for WIC are actually receiving it than in past years, and, on the recommendation of health and nutrition experts, fruits and vegetables have been added to this science-based program. Due to higher participation and food costs, WIC will need substantially more funding in FY2024 than either the Senate or House bills are proposing just to maintain participation and benefits. Depriving young children the nutrition they need is shortsighted and counterproductive.

International aid is also an urgent need. After decades of progress, the pandemic and related problems have driven hundreds of millions of people into hunger and deep poverty. Yet the House State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill proposes a deep cut in non-military international programs.

The number of people suffering near-famine conditions—most of them in very poor, war-torn, climate-vulnerable countries—has soared. The Senate's State and Foreign Operations bill is proposing a \$3.25 billion increase in emergency aid, but the House bill is not proposing any increase in emergency aid. We know from international experience that neglect of people in need leads to violence, political upheaval, and forced migration. A more stable and prosperous world contributes to peace and security for Americans as well as for our vulnerable neighbors.

As you work toward a continuing resolution and appropriations decisions for FY2024, please avoid a government shutdown and protect funding for programs that serve the most vulnerable.

We are encouraged by bipartisan efforts in both the Senate and House Agriculture Committees to pass a **Farm Bill** this year. We urge Congress to pass a Farm Bill that protects SNAP food assistance and international food assistance. We hope it will also include improvements such as making SNAP available to formerly incarcerated people and extending SNAP to Puerto Rico (to replace the current block-grant program).

Finally, we urge members of Congress to develop bipartisan legislation to improve the **Child Tax Credit** (CTC) for low-income families with children. Support for the CTC in the religious community is exceptionally broad and enthusiastic. Certainly, Congress should not approve more tax breaks for businesses without improving the CTC for low-income families.

Programs like WIC and SNAP, assistance to people in severe need around the world, and the CTC are pro-family and pro-life. They move us toward social peace and economic justice. They are expressions of moral and spiritual values that we all share.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

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

Sean Callahan, President and CEO, Catholic Relief Services

Rev. Dr. Iva E. Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

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

Rev. Dr. Thomas De Vries, President and CEO, Citygate Network

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

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

Rev. Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

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

Rev. Carlos Malavé, President, Latino Christian National Network

Ralph Middlecamp, President, Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Bridget Moix, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

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

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

Kerry Alys Robinson, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA

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

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

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