

April 11, 2023

The Honorable Speaker McCarthy
US House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Minority Leader Jeffries
US House of Representatives
1607 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Majority Leader Schumer
US Senate
322 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Minority Leader McConnell
US Senate
317 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell,

On behalf of the 22 undersigned faith organizations representing people of faith across religious traditions and denominations, we write today to urge you to protect critical anti-poverty programs - food, healthcare, and housing - that help the most vulnerable to thrive in the upcoming negotiations related to the budget. A common thread for all our communities is a commitment to advancing policies that enable all of God's children to care for their families, flourish in their communities, and contribute to our society. We look to our political leaders and legislators to use their power to join with the faithful in making that commitment a reality. As Congress faces crucial fiscal decisions in the coming months, it is imperative that programs that address the most fundamental tools needed to live in dignity and with security are protected and strengthened.

Everybody needs an affordable place to call home, healthcare to prevent illness and to heal when sick, and nutritious food to grow and sustain life. No one should have to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table or paying for medications. Without assistance to meet these basic needs, policymakers cannot expect struggling communities to prosper or our economy to grow in a way that offers our children and families stability, particularly during periods of high inflation. The advancement of policies to improve the economy during the start of the COVID pandemic allowed people and the U.S. economy to weather the worst financial harms with a measure of security.

We make this request based on sacred texts that instruct us to care for our neighbor. It is also based on intimate connections with people in crisis. Faith organizations minister to meet both the spiritual and temporal needs of our communities. Our places of worship are often at the forefront of efforts to provide food, shelter, and basic services to those facing an emergency. This work, however, is done in partnership with the federal government. We cannot meet the basic needs of those in poverty without government assistance. Charity is important, but it cannot replace just economic systems.

At this time, our request of policymakers is simple: resist any and all proposals to weaken access to food, shelter, and health care from cuts or structural change. We are all too aware of rhetoric from some that would target programs that protect individuals living in poverty and facing low wages, disability, old age, job cuts, and childcare obstacles. There is no economic challenge facing the country that can be morally or practically solved on the backs of those in our society who have the least.

Food: Federal food assistance is a lifeline for more than 40 million working adults in low-income jobs and their children, the poor elderly, persons with disabilities, and others in poverty. Like other such programs, the largest of them, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is subject to strict means testing and eligibility restrictions and is one of our most successful and fiscally conscious programs. With an average benefit of only \$6.10 a day, SNAP provides to those eligible the difference between bare subsistence and dire hunger.

Health Care: Nearly 85 million people are currently covered by Medicaid, which provides low-cost, efficient health care to low-income children, adults, people with disabilities, and seniors. Affordable Care premium tax

credits have made care more affordable for millions of low-, moderate-, and middle-income households. Taking Medicaid coverage away from people who do not document they meet a work requirement or eliminating ACA tax credits will put millions of people's health care at risk, weaken people's coverage and their ability to afford health care, and perpetuate racial health inequities. Likewise, capping federal Medicaid funding (via a "per capita cap" or block grant) is the same as a cut and would shift costs to states, forcing them to scale back benefits and services, and harm enrollees and the providers who serve them.

Housing: The US is in the midst of a major affordable housing crisis. There is a national shortage of approximately seven million affordable, available homes for people with the lowest incomes, and only one in four households who qualify for federal housing assistance receives the help it needs. Without adequate federal funding for vital federal affordable housing and homeless assistance programs, households with the lowest incomes will continue to live precariously, only one missed paycheck or unexpected emergency away from housing instability, eviction, and, in the worst cases, homelessness.

These crucial time-tested and proven programs face risk throughout the current Congress. Deliberations over the debt ceiling pose the first and most urgent of these. This is no time for reckless threats over future government spending that would hold our economy and the welfare of the entire nation hostage. Accordingly, we urge you to vote for a clean debt ceiling extension, and leave other funding issues for later—and less economically dangerous—discussion. And when those discussions take place, whether in the context of appropriations, the Farm Bill, tax law, or other venues, we urge you to hold the line against malicious cuts that unjustly target children, families, and other individuals living in poverty.

Those who would make deep cuts to these programs claim that cuts are needed to reduce fraud and abuse and lower the federal deficit. While thoughtful conversations about deficit reduction may be reasonable, attacking critical supports to housing, health, and food benefits aid is not. Instead, we must insist that the wealthy and corporations simply pay their fair share in taxes. Policymakers should also look to prevent waste in other spending programs, most notably, military spending, tax evasion by the wealthy, and benefits lavished on large corporations.

We urge you to join with communities of faith in resisting any legislation that would force our children, families, and communities struggling with poverty into economic devastation. We appreciate programs must be sufficient and sustainable, however, it is immoral to balance the budget on the backs of the poor.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee
Bread for the World
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd,
U.S. Provinces
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Missionary Oblates
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Jewish Women

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Poligon Education Fund
Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian
Church of America
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sojourners
The Episcopal Church
The United Methodist Church - General
Board of Church and Society
United Church of Christ and Local Church
Ministries
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice