



# CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

May 26, 2016

Dear Chairmen Conaway, Price, Brady, Kline, and Hensarling:

We write to you as the steering committee of the Circle of Protection, a coalition of 60 leaders who head Christian denominations and organizations. We come from all the main families of U.S. Christianity – Catholic, evangelical Protestant, ecumenical Protestant, the Historic African-American churches, and Latino churches. One thing on which we all agree is that our country’s policies should reflect Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25 about how nations should treat “the least of these.” God created each of us in His image, and so we are to treat every person with dignity and respect. Yet God has special concern for those who are poor. In Psalm 113 we are told that God sees the needy and raises them from destitution to community. In lifting up individuals most in need, we are living out our faith, doing God’s work. For this reason, the leadership of the Circle of Protection is committed to both private philanthropic action and federal policy that prioritizes people struggling with poverty in the U.S. and around the world, while increasing opportunity for all of God’s children.

We applaud Speaker Ryan’s focus on addressing poverty. The House of Representatives’ Task Force on Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility provides an opportunity to advance an anti-poverty agenda in a way we haven’t seen in decades. We believe it is possible to end hunger and extreme poverty in our country and around the world if our leaders make it a top priority. The task force will play an important part in building that political will. We impress upon you both the honor and the weighty obligation of your role in this process on behalf of those most in need.

The Circle of Protection Steering Committee is seeking meetings with each of the members of the Poverty Task Force. We support your efforts towards ending poverty and hunger. We offer ourselves as a resource. Our organizations and churches are working in every zip code and type of community. Many of those who help, as well as those who need help, are members of our churches and communities.

Below, please find a core set of policy principles we hope you will incorporate into your recommendations:

- 1) We see a distinction between core benefits and other services.** Core benefits enable people to eat, have a roof over their heads, and get necessary medical care. We believe it is essential our country maintains a national basic and dynamic safety net. With respect to some services, which are provided largely through discretionary programs, they should be based on evidence and best practices, and in that light, it would be useful to conduct careful experiments, establishing pilot programs, and testing new things to learn what’s most effective.
- 2) Work and human dignity are intertwined.** Work is essential to an opportunity economy. Decent jobs at decent wages and benefits are the best path out of poverty. However, individuals unable to find decent jobs should have access to subsidized jobs, apprenticeships, or other training and education that will create a pathway to economic stability.
- 3) Funding focused on reducing poverty should be made as effective as possible, but not cut.** We view the federal budget as a document which should reflect our Nation’s values. While the nation needs to reduce future deficits, it should not be at the expense of people struggling with hunger and poverty. Efforts to reduce

poverty should be based on building on the assets that individuals and communities possess, and should aim at family stability.

- 4) **We have deep concerns about proposals that would block grant, merge funding for, or fundamentally restructure major low-income entitlement programs, particularly SNAP and Medicaid, whether on a national basis or in various states.** During the Great Recession, food insecurity levels rose in 2008 but then remained stable in 2009 and 2010 despite increasing poverty and unemployment rates, demonstrating SNAP's effectiveness at preventing hunger when the economy sours. The basic countercyclical structure of these programs enables them to respond automatically to economic downturns, natural disasters, and spikes in need. SNAP's national eligibility and benefit structure are crucial to ensuring nutritional assistance to poor people regardless of where they live. The need to account for dramatic changes in economic conditions over time makes even piloting such proposed changes extremely difficult.
- 5) **A number of strong bipartisan proposals already exist in several areas—** food security, EITC expansion, international assistance, sentencing reform, quick interventions for families near poverty, employment assistance for those difficult to employ, increased access to child care –and we hope you consider them in your recommendations, as well as strong contributors to poverty like racial discrimination and a lack of family support.
- 6) We affirm that **there is a strong connection between poverty and discrimination** or implicit bias that locks people of color out of opportunities. Every effort should be made in an anti-poverty initiative to end racial discrimination where it is proven to exist.

As Christians, we are rooted in the love of God in Jesus Christ. Our task is to share these blessings with love and justice and with a special priority for those who are poor. Please let us know when we can meet with you to discuss ways we can assist your work. We are praying for you and the people you represent.

Sincerely,



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Bread for the World



Galen Carey  
Vice President for Government Relations  
National Association of Evangelicals



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Sèkinah Hamlin, Director  
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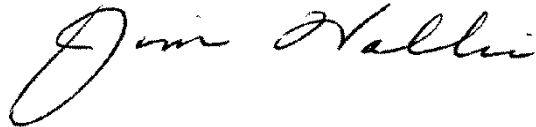
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