



November 14, 2016

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

In considering federal spending priorities to reach a bi-partisan end-of-year agreement, we urge you to draw a **“circle of protection”** around the many programs that serve poor and vulnerable people at home. As conversations toward an agreement become more specific, it is important that short-term gains not be sought to the detriment of those most in need.

As the 114th Congress concludes, the Catholic Bishops of the United States will express views and encourage action on a variety of other important issues in separate correspondence. We stand ready to work with leaders of both parties to protect poor and vulnerable people, promote human life and dignity, and advance the common good.

Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*, that all of us are in need of a new perspective, including those charged with fostering a robust political order:

[W]e can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. (No. 188)

Despite general improvement, **1 in 5 children** continue to live in poverty. Recent federal data shows that **15.8 million** U.S. households continue to suffer from food insecurity, including **3 million** households with children. Catholic Charities agencies see the realities of poverty everyday serving over **8.2 million** people in 2015, attempting to mitigate the impacts of poverty on vulnerable people.

We therefore urge you to resist damaging structural changes to domestic anti-poverty programs and robustly fund those initiatives that help vulnerable children, pregnant women, seniors, and persons with disabilities. If spending caps become a serious point of discussion, allocation of additional resources ought to reflect a preference for human needs, and not disproportionately prioritize other spending.

We urge you to protect and fully fund domestic nutrition programs that help hungry people. Programs such as **The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**, **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, and **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**, help vulnerable children, pregnant women, seniors, and persons with disabilities impacted by hunger and food insecurity.

In light of the affordable housing crisis in our nation, Congress should provide adequate funding for **Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance, Housing for the Elderly (Section 202), People with Disabilities (Section 811), People with AIDS (HOPWA), Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH), McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance, the Community Development Block Grant**, and other programs that serve vulnerable households and communities.

We welcomed the bipartisan support for funding these programs during Committee considerations and urge their continued protection and full funding during year-end discussions. At the same time, we strongly request that you give greater priority to the following programs which still lack needed support and which have a proven history of supporting the poor and vulnerable in our communities.

- **Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance:** The number of families that struggle to pay rent and make ends meet has increased dramatically over the past decade with only 1 in 4 eligible families receiving federal rental assistance. Over the past two years, housing agencies have restored to use tens of thousands of vouchers that were cut in the wake of the 2013 sequestration. However to build upon this progress, additional resources are needed to ensure that those receiving support continue to receive it.
- **Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP):** Provides critical local temporary food, shelter and rental assistance support to families facing economic crisis. The program is a unique public-private partnerships which allows local communities to identify their needs and provide support where needed. While EFSP played a heightened role during the Great Recession of 2008, Congress cut the program's funding by 40 percent beginning in Fiscal Year 2011 (from \$200 million to \$120 million, annually). We therefore urge you to support the amount approved by the House Appropriations Committee (\$120 million) in H. Rept. 114-668 on June 22, 2016.
- **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Grants:** We urge you to retain funding for the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Part B Formula Grants under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. This program helps states to reform their juvenile justice systems and gathers data and research to assist in evaluation. The funding reaches approximately a quarter of a million juveniles each year, and 86% of program youth served exhibited some desired change in behavior. In 2014, only 9% of program youth offended or re-offended during the reporting period. This program should receive funding at the level of \$63 million.

In addition to support for Community Health Centers, Head Start, mental health services and workforce development programs, we hope that the programs listed above are given added priority as you finalize the FY17 appropriations bills.

We see every day the human consequences of budget choices. Our Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. These voices are too often missing from public policy debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our limited resources.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD
President and CEO
Catholic Charities USA