



January 17, 2018

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

Dear Representative:

As you finalize 2018 spending priorities, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (“USCCB”) and Catholic Charities USA (“CCUSA”) urge you to pass a budget agreement that draws a **“circle of protection”** around the many programs that serve poor people at home, **reauthorizes critical health programs** such as the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) and Community Health Center Funds, **protects Dreamers** from deportation, and ensures good stewardship of the environment. These ought to be bipartisan priorities given their dramatic effects on the vulnerable and the common good. Other USCCB policy offices have expressed, or may yet express, their requests for the appropriations package, which together represent the breadth of concern of the bishops in the budget and appropriations process.

In his Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis wrote, “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).

The USCCB and CCUSA have long supported the goal of reducing future unsustainable deficits that would harm all citizens, especially those in need. However, a just framework for sound fiscal policy cannot rely almost exclusively on disproportionate cuts in essential services to persons in poverty. Sharp increases in defense and immigration enforcement spending, coupled with severe reductions to non-defense discretionary spending—particularly to many domestic and international programs that assist struggling individuals and families—are profoundly troubling. If spending caps become a serious point of discussion, Congress’ decisions ought to reflect a preference for human needs.

While the economy by many measures is improving, the reality is **1 in 5 children** continue to face the daily struggles of living in poverty. Moreover, **15.6 million** U.S. households continue to suffer from food insecurity, including **3.1 million** households with children. Catholic Charities agencies see the realities of poverty every day, serving over **8.3 million** people in need last year.

Given the level of struggle, fully funding domestic nutrition programs that help hungry people is vital, 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)**. Children, pregnant women, seniors, and persons with disabilities impacted by hunger and food insecurity should remain a top priority.

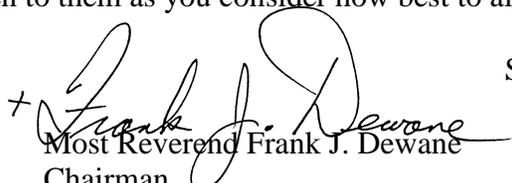
In light of the affordable housing crisis in our nation, Congress should provide adequate funding for **Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance**, **Housing for the Elderly (Section 202)**, **People with Disabilities (Section 811)**, **People with AIDS (HOPWA)**, **Veterans Affairs**

Supported Housing (HUD-VASH), McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance, the Community Development Block Grant, and other programs that serve vulnerable households and communities. We also encourage you to take steps to **increase the value of Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs)** to offset the chilling effect of the proposed reduction of the corporate tax rate on the development of new affordable housing.

In addition to support for **Community Health Centers, Head Start, mental health services and workforce development programs,** the programs listed below have a proven history of supporting the poor and vulnerable in our communities. They should be carefully considered in 2018 funding decisions:

- **Preserve Medicaid and Medicare.** Keeping in mind that health care is a human right, Congress should avoid altering the Medicaid or Medicare programs in any way that would severely impact those served by them. The Medicaid program provided health insurance to 72.3 million financially vulnerable people every month in 2017. Nearly 40% of those recipients – approximately 28.2 million – were children. Another 16.4 million people were blind, disabled, or aged. Likewise, in 2017 Medicare provided health insurance to approximately 58 million people, on average, per month. All Medicare recipients are either aged or disabled, and they deserve special concern.
- **Reauthorize CHIP, MIECHV, and the Community Health Center Fund.** On September 30th, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Maternal, Infant, and early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV) and Community Health Center Funds authorizations expired. These three programs contribute to providing access to health care for children and provide the local community support for new mothers and families. Without renewal of these programs, states and local communities will face dramatic cuts in services and immediate impacts on community health.
- **Protect Dreamers.** Over 800,000 individuals who have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) were brought to the United States as children and continue to live in fear of deportation and being separated from their families. Many of these youths and their families are contributors to our economy, academic leaders and active members of our parishes. They exemplify the extraordinary contributions that immigrants provide to our nation. It is both our moral duty and in our nation’s best interest to protect them and help them reach their God-given potential. We urge a permanent legislative solution that does not undermine family immigration.

Both at home and abroad, our Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, cares for creation and ministers to the sick. The voices of the marginalized are too often missing from public policy debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences. For the sake of the common good, we ask that you listen to them as you consider how best to allocate the scarce resources of our nation.

+ 
Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Sincerely,


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