



# CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

September 12, 2018

Dear Members of Congress,

As members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee, we come together as leaders from a wide array of Christian bodies and organizations. Since 2011, we have worked together to maintain a Circle of Protection around people struggling with hunger, poverty, and injustice.

As Christians, we believe that God is especially concerned with the plight of those living in poverty—and that a key moral measure of our federal policies is how they treat those Jesus called "the least of these" (Matthew 25:45). While those living at the economic margins of society do not have powerful lobbies in Washington, they do have a compelling claim on our consciences.

Right now, the House and Senate are negotiating a final Farm Bill, which will have serious consequences for the country, especially individuals struggling with hunger and food insecurity. **We urge you to pass a final Farm Bill that does not reduce SNAP funding or the number of people who receive SNAP food assistance.**

We oppose the House Agriculture Committee's version because it would eliminate SNAP food assistance for about 2.6 million people. It would reduce food assistance by \$20 billion, in large part to finance an expanded SNAP bureaucracy. Beneficiaries would need to report their status (whether they are working, caring for small children, disabled, or elderly) monthly rather than twice a year—a six-fold increase in paperwork, frustration, and possibilities for error. The bill would also impose additional job requirements. The very limited funding it provides for job training would not allow for effective training.

We also oppose a provision in the House bill that would impose on certain ex-offenders a lifetime ban on SNAP food assistance. This would punish people who have already paid their debt to society, negatively impact their families, and make even more difficult the task of rebuilding their lives as productive and law-abiding citizens.

Our churches and service organizations work closely with people in need of SNAP. We know first-hand that 40% of SNAP recipients already work at low wages or live in a household where somebody works. Another 50% are disabled or elderly.

In contrast, the Senate passed a bipartisan bill that does not include damaging cuts to SNAP. **We urge you to support a final Farm Bill with a nutrition title that protects and strengthens SNAP, modeled after the Senate version.**

Scripture tells us "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). For this reason, the leadership of the Circle of Protection is committed to working to ensure that federal policy, such as the Farm Bill, lifts up those in need, both in the United States and abroad. Please prioritize vulnerable individuals and struggling families by protecting and strengthening SNAP in the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee

John Ashmen, President, Citygate Network

\* Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World

Rebecca Blachly, Director of the Office of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, General Secretary and Chief Administrative Officer, Progressive National Baptist Convention

Galen Carey, Vice President, National Association of Evangelicals

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

Noel Castellanos, President, Christian Community Development Association

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

\* Rev. Carlos Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together U.S.A. (in his personal capacity)

Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA

Ralph Middlecamp, President, National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Jonathan Reyes, Assistant General Secretary for Integral Human Development, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

\* Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners

\* Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network and President, Skinner Leadership Institute

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary, National Council of Churches

\* Circle of Protection Steering Committee Co-ordinators are marked with an asterisk