



# CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

March 6, 2019

Dear Senator/Representative,

We write to you as leaders of the Circle of Protection, an unprecedented group of religious leaders who head Christian denominations and organizations from all the major branches of Christianity. We care deeply about many issues facing our country and world. Ending hunger and poverty is a top priority that we all share. Together, we are working to ensure the vitality of programs serving people in or near poverty in the United States and around the world, while supporting efforts to end poverty and increase opportunity for all of God's children.

We believe budgets are moral documents; they reveal our values and show our priorities. Budgets show who and what we view as important. Later this year, Congress and the President will need to come together to reach a new budget agreement on topline funding levels for discretionary programs. Without such a deal, discretionary funding levels will return to austere levels required by the 2011 Budget Control Act, putting non-defense discretionary programs at risk of deep cuts.

We urge you to pass a bipartisan budget agreement that both reverses harmful sequestration cuts and expands investments in critical programs serving people in poverty—both in the U.S. and around the world. We further urge you to prioritize funding for program areas targeted to help low-income individuals afford the essentials, such as low-income housing assistance, child care, and poverty-focused international assistance.

If Congress fails to act, non-defense discretionary spending will face a 12 percent (\$55 billion) cut compared to FY '19 levels. It is not enough to simply prevent cuts to domestic and international anti-poverty programs. We call for additional investments in these programs.

Low-income housing assistance programs help 5 million low-income families afford housing, prevent homelessness, and alleviate housing instability. Just one in four low-income individuals who needs housing assistance gets it. There is already a shortage of 7.2 million affordable and available homes for America's lowest-income households, and an estimated 10,000 public housing units are lost each year due to underfunding and inflation.

In recent years, the last budget agreement allowed Congress to increase funding for child care assistance. Those funds are helping expand access to child care and improve the quality of care children receive. Still, only one in six low-income children eligible for child care assistance receives it. Congress should build on the investment made in 2018 and 2019, so that more low-income working parents can afford the safe and quality care their children need.

For a small investment—less than 0.5% of the federal budget—poverty-focused development assistance programs provide humanitarian relief, improved nutrition, better farming techniques and agricultural productivity, safe water and sanitation, access to education and health care—and much more. These programs have supported dramatic reductions in hunger, poverty, and disease. Effective programs in Central America address the poverty and violence that are driving much of the migration to our southern border.

We do not support sharp increases to defense spending that are made possible by corresponding reductions in non-defense discretionary spending, particularly in programs that help poor and vulnerable people. The biblical prophets teach us that our security depends in part on upholding justice for people in poverty.

Our loving God has made it possible for our generation to end hunger. The prophet Micah tells us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Our churches are doing their part, operating food pantries, soup kitchens, mentoring programs, and other community services. Private charity, however, is not enough. We need you, our elected leaders, to be partners in this effort, fostering greater opportunity for all so we can move toward God’s vision of a world without hunger or poverty.

Sincerely,

Members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee



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



Galen Carey, Vice President of Government Relations, National Association of Evangelicals



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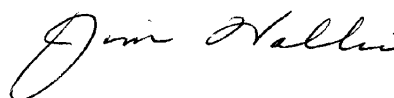
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