



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

March 27, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

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." We are all created in God's own 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 people in need and raises them from destitution to equality with the rich and powerful. In advocating alongside people most in need, we are living out our faith.

We urge you to immediately pass a disaster assistance package with \$600 million for Puerto Rico's Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP). Absent action, 1.35 million people in Puerto Rico, a third of its population, will see deep cuts to their current nutrition assistance. For example, a family of four with little or no income received the maximum NAP benefit of \$649 in February. This is the same benefit level a similar household in the rest of the country receives from SNAP. However, in Puerto Rico, that household would see its monthly benefit cut to the pre-disaster benefit level of \$410, a 37 percent cut. Up to 230,000 individuals could lose food assistance altogether. Some have already started to experience cuts.

In Puerto Rico, NAP operates in place of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As a block grant, NAP does not automatically expand or contract in response to need. Congress allocated additional funding for NAP in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. This disaster food assistance funding has been critical to helping families meet basic food needs while still recovering from the devastation of the hurricanes. That additional NAP funding was meant to be temporary, but Puerto Rico has not recovered. Without Congressional action, that funding will be depleted this month, even though desperate need remains. Additionally, cuts of this magnitude will undermine economic growth critical to the Commonwealth's recovery.

As Christians, we are rooted in the love of God in Jesus Christ. As a nation, we are called to seek justice and provide relief to those who are suffering. We call on Congress to immediately extend \$600 million in NAP funding for Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,

Members of the Circle of Protection Steering Committee



Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals



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



John Ashmen, President, Citygate Network, Formerly the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions



* Rev. Carlos Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together U.S.A.



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



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



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



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



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



Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation



The Most Rev. Bishop Frank J. Dewane, Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Amy Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



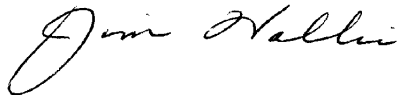
Rev. Ebony Grisom, Director, Ecumenical Poverty Initiative



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-
Coordinators are marked with an asterisk*