



Working to Reduce Poverty in America

June 25, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McConnell:

Chair of the Board
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Sr. Donna Markham OP, PhD

Episcopal Liaison
The Most Reverend
Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice

Since the death of George Floyd in May, many of us continue to find ourselves moved to tears. Our horror at watching this video will be something we can never forget. Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) remains disturbed by the continued acts of wanton indifference to human life, especially to the lives of our African American brothers and sisters. We believe that each person is made in God's image and likeness with inherent dignity, principles found both in our religious heritage and in the very words of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." We need a change of heart and a transformation of public policy to confront systemic racism.

I am writing today for three reasons. First, we lend our support to the establishment of a Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys (H.R. 1636 and S. 2163). As a national network of social service agencies, we are happy to offer information that can be of help in this important work.

Second, we ask you to support HR 35/S. 488, the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act and Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2019, which establishes a new criminal civil rights violation for lynching.

Lastly, the stain of racism has polluted our public policies for generations with the result that African Americans are more likely to be economically vulnerable than white Americans. Years of over-policing in black communities and unjust sentencing laws have led African Americans to be 6.4 times as likely as white Americans to be incarcerated. Biased financial lending practices and redlining have stripped from African American families the ability to build family wealth through homeownership. Additionally, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for African Americans is about double the rate for whites and has been for most of the last six decades. There must be a bipartisan effort to address this historic inequity. Sadly, the recent COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrates that minorities continue to be disproportionately affected.

As Congress considers various public policy proposals we encourage you to pursue a holistic and integrated approach to racial justice, including priorities such as:



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- Improved Fair Housing Laws
- Increased Federal Funding for Affordable Housing
- Stronger Laws to Punish Predatory Lenders
- Progressive Affirmative Action Policies in Education and Employment
- Quality Educational Opportunity for the Poor
- “Digital Inclusion” and Access to Technology
- Comprehensive Immigration Reform
- Comprehensive Criminal Justice Reform
- Investments in the Nation’s Social Safety Net

Congress must demonstrate a commitment to the values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for the most marginalized and as a first step in bringing the country together in unity and peace. Community is created by human beings, by our choices and actions. CCUSA stands ready to help in the work for racial justice, to reduce disparities and to promote the common good of our beloved community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sister Donna Markham, OP." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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