With the enactment of the American Rescue Plan to further address the COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerable people, and the nation as a whole, will still need further support to promote their well-being and the country’s economic recovery. As Congress and the Biden administration negotiate priorities for infrastructure legislation, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) asks that more funding and support be provided to ensure families and persons remain housed, fed, healthy and financially stable.

We offer the following priorities and recommendations for consideration:

Invest in Housing and Prevent Homelessness

CCUSA strongly believes that any strategy to reduce poverty in America must also confront homelessness and the affordable housing crisis. Additionally, policy must address the deep connection between racism and poverty, particularly concerning housing, lending, education and employment.

Recommendations

- Expand rental assistance for every eligible household.
- Expand Housing Choice Voucher program and provide multi-year/mandatory funding to help people afford housing.
- Increase federal support to build more affordable housing, including increased funding of the low-income housing tax credit and its related programs. These investments should also be expanded and reformed to better serve rural communities.
- Invest $40 billion in the National Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve affordable homes for the lowest-income and most marginalized households, including those in rural communities.
- Expand opportunities for people of color to purchase their own homes.
- Expand investments in Section 515 USDA Rural Housing and the Multifamily Housing Preservation and Revitalization Program to preserve affordable homes in rural communities.
- Provide $70 billion to repair public housing.
Immigration

Immigrants are a vital part of our essential workforce. We saw throughout the COVID-19 pandemic how immigrants provide essential work as caregivers and agricultural and food supply chain workers. We must recognize as a country that immigrants are needed for a successful American future and our immigration laws and policies must prioritize the well-being of immigrants, children and families.
Recommendations

• Include a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, both Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders, and undocumented essential workers in infrastructure legislation.

• Include a pathway to legalization for unauthorized agricultural workers and reform the existing temporary agricultural worker visa program, to address current labor shortages and avoid shortages in the future.

• Address the infrastructure necessary to provide welcome to refugees, unaccompanied children, and asylum seekers by establishing a Refugee and Entrant Contingency Fund and appropriating $2 billion in supplemental funding for this fund.
Nutrition

As the Administration has stressed, the pandemic has added urgency to the issue of nutrition insecurity, especially for low-income families. A poor diet jeopardizes a child’s ability to learn in school and contributes to diet-related diseases that decrease work productivity. CCUSA supports proposed initiatives that will ensure that the nutritional needs of families are met. We urge Congress and the Administration to:

Recommendations

- Extend the WIC certification period to two years.
- Extend program eligibility for children from 5 years until their sixth birthday.
- Extend postpartum eligibility to two years for all mothers.
- Allow an additional meal or snack for children in a full day of care.
- Streamline the process to eliminate burdensome and outdated paperwork by allowing SNAP participants to provide updates about their circumstances rather than the recertification process, and continue using technology that permits households to apply for SNAP by phone, including using a stored digital signature.
- Facilitate re-entry for formerly incarcerated individuals through SNAP eligibility. SNAP is a critical safety net for many individuals as they search for employment to support themselves and their families. We can improve equity because we know this restriction disproportionately impacts African Americans, who are convicted of drug offenses at much higher rates than white Americans.
Support to Strengthen Families and Persons

Before the pandemic more than 34 million people already lived in poverty. As a result of the coronavirus, the economy has lost more than 10 million jobs, pushing millions of people into poverty. Poverty not only threatens the dignity of human life and the ability to meet basic needs, but also threatens family stability. Family economic security reflects a broad array of activities that build stronger families and communities. Catholic Charities agencies offer support programs that promote family economic security including income support, asset development and other financial resources; foster healthy family connections; provide safety and stability; prevent and alleviate family crises; and protect vulnerable children and families.

Recommendations

- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage.
- Provide access to paid and medical family leave for all workers and families.
- Reform unemployment insurance and ensure quick access to critical unemployment benefits during times of economic crisis.
- Provide access to employment and educational opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed, including formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Make college and post-secondary education accessible and affordable for all.
- Provide student loan debt relief, including canceling student loan debt.
- Provide a permanent expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to make it available to all workers in need and make the CTC permanently fully refundable.
- Expand early childhood care and education services to ensure all children access to early learning programs such as STEM, access to learning technology, and reading initiatives.
- Provide a permanent expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit expansion for childless workers.
- Make permanent the temporary expansion of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit to make child care affordable for all.
- Maintain policies that protect human life, including Hyde amendment protections.
Invest in Workforce Development and Job Creation

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant job losses. Close to 15% of adults have reported being laid off or losing their jobs. Women and low-wage workers have been disproportionately impacted by job losses. Jobs programs and policies to promote employment at livable wages, for all who can work, are necessary to help boost our nation’s economy and the well-being of communities, families and persons.

Recommendations

• Support robust funding of the Workforce Innovation Act and other programs that encourage entrepreneurship.
• Invest in funding for training programs that allow people to access jobs created under the American Jobs plan.
• Expand access and funding for apprenticeship programs.
• Raise the minimum wage to a living wage to provide benefits for caregivers, child care, and home care workers.
Invest in Policies that Support Children and Youth

Children and youth have experienced significant challenges in education, child care services, mental and behavioral health and well-being. Therefore, it is important for Congress to ensure that these challenges be addressed in any pandemic recovery legislation.

Recommendations

• Ensure stable and adequate funding for child care subsidy programs so that all families, especially the working poor, can have access to quality and affordable child care.

• Provide funding to assist child care providers with developing programs to ensure families with access to high-quality child care.

• Invest in education programs such as universal pre-K, early Head Start, and Head Start programs.
Invest in Policies that Support Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Seniors and persons with disabilities have also felt the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to their economic well-being, health, mental health, employment, family life, and support services. Congress must support policies and funding that improve the health and financial security of our nation’s elderly and persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

• Support policy and increased funding for programs that allow seniors to remain in their homes/communities and provide access to important preventive health services, respite care, caregiver services, home delivery of meals, transportation, Medicare, Medicaid, housing assistance, senior employment and other support services to elderly Americans.

• Protect the Senior Employment program from elimination.

• Increase the minimum Supplemental Security Income benefit level to at least the federal poverty level to reduce poverty and hardship and ensure that people with disabilities and older adults are better able to meet their basic needs.

• Increase outdated asset limits for SSI to at minimum reflect modern-day costs and index for inflation, if not eliminated outright.
Tax Policy

How our nation allocates its financial resources is a moral question that speaks to the dignity of persons and the common good. While ensuring that the necessary resources are available to fight poverty is a sound investment and will save money in the long run, we also know that it will require new and expanded revenues in the short term. CCUSA supports tax policies that will benefit lower- and middle-income taxpayers and vulnerable communities and charities and nonprofits, while asking those with greater means to bear more of the responsibility for alleviating poverty and investing in the future of this country.

Recommendations

- Provide a permanent expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to make it available to all workers in need and make the CTC permanently fully refundable.
- Expand quality early childhood services.
- Permanently expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) expansion for childless workers.
- Make permanent the temporary expansion of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CTC) to make child care affordable for all.
- Provide direct access to housing vouchers for community-based organizations providing services to homeless and hard-to-serve populations.
- Support direct assistance for community-based organizations that provide assistance with outreach and assist low-income and non-tax filers with obtaining EITC/CTC.
- Support charities and nonprofits by establishing and funding a $50 billion grant program to help nonprofit organizations retain their employees, scale their service delivery, and create new job opportunities for unemployed persons to serve within their communities (WORK NOW Act).
- Modify and extend the deduction for charitable contributions for individuals who do not otherwise itemize their tax deductions (Universal Giving Pandemic Response and Recovery Act).
Health Care

Continued support for those who need access and affordability to quality healthcare is critical to the populations that Catholic Charities agencies serve. Support for critical healthcare programs must be met with all the resources available. The experience with COVID and its devastating impact, especially on seniors in nursing homes and related facilities, demands that all possible resources must be provided to make sure that a repeat of COVID never occurs again. Support for all senior programs is critical to family stability at all levels. Helping seniors get the necessary safety net support should be fully funded.

Recommendations

• Ensure access to life-sustaining affordable health care.
• Close the Medicaid coverage gap that has left an estimated 2.2 million people with incomes below the poverty line without coverage.
• Increase funding for behavioral/mental health and telehealth care.
• Provide the necessary resources for nursing homes and the wrap-around services that residents require.
Invest in Broadband Access

Seniors, rural communities and children, particularly from low-income families, have been greatly impacted by the lack of access to affordable broadband internet. Telehealth, education and other key services have also suffered due to poor internet access. Additional support and investment are needed to ensure all sectors of society can benefit from improvement to the technology infrastructure.

Recommendations

- Increase measures that provide low-cost or free internet access to low-income communities, impoverished communities of color and rural communities.
- Expand access to free and affordable broadband internet service.
- Increase funding for the FCC Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant.

For further information contact:

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