



Legislative Priorities 117th Congress

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with Congress in service to the common good of the nation, with a particular concern for the vulnerable families and individuals we serve every day.

CCUSA is a national membership organization representing 167 diocesan Catholic Charities member agencies. These member agencies operate more than 2,600 service locations across 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories. The diverse array of social services offered by Catholic Charities agencies reached more than 13 million individuals in need last year.

The mission of CCUSA is to provide service to people in need, to advocate for justice in social structures and to call the church and other people of good will to do the same. For more than 110 years, the Catholic Charities community has advocated for just and fair policies that help people reach their full potential. Our Catholic tradition teaches that society, acting through government and civil society, has a special obligation to consider the needs of persons and families who are poor and vulnerable. Additionally, Catholic Charities strongly believes that any strategy to reduce poverty in America must also confront the deep connection between racism and poverty.

We respectfully submit the following requests and recommendations for consideration to guide the 117th Congress's policy priorities as it works in conjunction with the Biden administration.

Poverty and Racial Justice

CCUSA renews its commitment to racial justice as a national goal and priority with a call to our sisters and brothers to advocate for specific policy proposals. We work to alleviate and reduce the growing inequality in our society and acknowledge there are critical ways for us to take concerted action towards this goal through direct service and policy changes. Catholic Charities strongly believes that any strategy to reduce poverty in America must also confront the deep connection between racism and poverty particularly in relation to housing, lending, education and employment.





Recommendations

Improve Fair Housing Laws

- Ensure greater accountability and transparency in the mortgage industry (e.g., Community Reinvestment Act).
- Provide effective oversight of lending agencies to ensure equal access to the funding necessary to obtain housing financing.

Increase Federal Funding for Affordable Housing

- Increase federal support to build more affordable housing, including increased funding of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and its related programs.
- Expand opportunities for people of color to purchase their own homes.
- Intentionally include communities of color in federal mortgage guarantees.

Establish Laws to Punish Predatory Lenders

- Cap the interest rate that can be charged for short-term loans.
- Ensure greater transparency of the conditions of such loans in accessible language for those who might have limited education or English proficiency.

Support Affirmative Action Policies in Education and Employment

- Sustain affirmative action in employment and education to address and rectify the pervasive discrimination and social stigma suffered by people of color and women.
- Increase aggressive recruitment and targeted advertising campaigns for employment resulting in more progressive affirmative action policies in education and employment.
- Offer remedial education and job training programs.
- Support vigilant enforcement of nondiscrimination laws related to federally protected classes.
- Encourage flexible hiring goals, recruitment targets and promotion timetables.

For more detail, please see the [CCUSA Poverty and Racism Paper](#).



Economic Security

Prior to 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; safety and stability; prevent and alleviate family crises; and protect vulnerable children and families.

Recommendations

Promote policies that support and strengthen families

- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage.
- Expand access to employment, education, and services for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Support robust funding of the Workforce Innovation Act and other programs that encourage entrepreneurship.
- Expand access and funding for apprenticeship programs.
- Promote access to educational training and opportunities.
- Make college and post-secondary education affordable.
- Provide student loan debt relief including cancelling student loan debt.
- Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit to make it available to all workers in need; expand quality early childhood services.
- Provide access to paid and medical family leave.
- Ensure access to life-sustaining affordable health care.

Promote policies that support children and youth

- Invest in education programs such as pre-K, early Head Start, and Head Start programs.
- Improve services and systems to keep children safe and secure.
- Provide effective support to foster and dislocated youth to ensure that all children who have been abused or neglected, including those in foster care, have the services and support they need to heal and thrive.

- Preserve and enhance quality health treatment and rehabilitation services to abused or neglected children and youth.
- Ensure stable and adequate funding for child care subsidy programs so that all families in need, especially the working poor, can have access to quality and affordable child care.
- Provide a child-focused paid parental policy. Additionally, any increases in work requirements must be accompanied by corresponding childcare funding.

Promote policies that support seniors

- Increase funding for senior programs that provide important preventive health services, home delivery of meals, transportation, Medicare, Medicaid, housing assistance, senior employment and other support services to elderly Americans.
- Increase funding for Caregiver programs.
- Protect the Senior Employment program from elimination.

Climate Change

As a national network of Catholic social service agencies, CCUSA and its agencies work to bolster true sustainability by protecting our common home, the earth, and safeguarding the well-being of low-income persons, families and communities.

As Pope Francis writes in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, "A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." Our network is also directly involved in disaster recovery. When a community is impacted by a disaster, our agencies respond with staff and volunteers to bring aid and comfort.

Recommendations

- Promote policies that reduce reliance on fossil fuels and encourage new energy sources such as wind and solar, and allow for efficient disaster recovery efforts for all individuals, with an emphasis on protecting vulnerable persons and communities.





- Support policies enumerated in the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2019 and work to support the creation of an independent National Disaster Safety Board that studies the underlying causes of disaster, related fatalities and property damage nationwide often due to the effects of climate change. The board must include an emphasis on disaster impacts on low-income communities and ensure that recommendations are made to protect these communities in the future.
- Promote policies and incentives to help charities and nonprofits afford energy efficiency upgrades.
- Continue to ensure that the National Flood Insurance Program remains accessible and affordable to low-income households who live-in high-risk hazard areas.
- Advise FEMA to revise its policy to account for and address the threats of climate change, to include considerations of climate change in the strategic plan of the Agency, resourcing and funding priorities, and other purposes.

Support for Disaster Relief

Recommendations

- Provide appropriations for the Department of Agriculture’s “Emergency Grants to Assist Low-Income Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers” (42 U.S.C. 5177a). To our knowledge, this program was last used in 2008 for wildfire relief in California.
- Provide an additional \$250 million for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP).
- Provide additional funding for Community Development Block Grants.
- Provide Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) equal to or greater than the CARES Act’s \$5 billion.
- Provide additional funding for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) equal to or greater than the CARES Act’s \$1 billion.

Immigration and Refugee Policy

For more than 110 years the Catholic Charities community has advocated for just and fair policies that help people reach their full potential. Our Catholic tradition teaches that immigrants, refugees and all displaced persons are to be cared for with dignity and respect. Our agencies recognize the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of where they come from or how they arrived in our care.

We serve migrants along the border and throughout the interior by providing basic human needs such as food, shelter, and clothing; provide asylum seekers with immigration legal assistance; assist families with social work case management; resettle refugees from all corners of the world; and assist essential workers with a range of services.

Recommendations

- Support comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship, allows families to reunite and remain intact, provide due process and worker protections.
- Provide legal status and a pathway to citizenship for all essential workers, including frontline healthcare and agricultural workers, as well as all DREAMERS and those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and their families.
- Continue Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- Provide appropriate levels of funding for FY 2022 refugee resettlement with an increase in the number of refugee admissions to at least the historical average of 95,000.
- Provide TPS for individuals from El Salvador, Honduras, Sudan, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Nepal Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.
- Support policies that address the root causes of migration including the development of a just and humane foreign policy strategy toward the northern countries of Central America.
- Increase poverty-reducing humanitarian and development funding to Central America ensuring accountability and transparency for the economic and security assistance that is provided.
- Address the root causes of migration and support just and humane border policies including access to the rights of asylum, due process and the cessation of mass detention.
- Provide economic impact payments to those who file taxes with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) and ensure that all U.S. citizen children are eligible, as well as recently arrived refugees, asylees, and those admitted under the Cuban-Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP).





- Place restrictions on, and use alternatives to, detention, and ensure adequate public health protections on immigration detention during COVID-19.
- Make testing, treatment, and vaccination for COVID-19 available to all regardless of immigrant status and provide coverage by Emergency Medicaid when necessary.

Religious Liberty

We request policy safeguards to ensure Catholic Charities agencies can serve people in need in a manner consistent with our faith, values and ethical commitments. In its history, Catholic Charities agencies have enjoyed a cooperative partnership with government at all levels to work for the common good. Such cooperation has been predicated on valuing diverse perspectives and mutual respect. The importance of broad religious exemptions allows for this cooperative relationship to continue in a way that best serves vulnerable people and communities, the organizations that serve them and the good of the nation.

Recommendations

- Support policies and legislation that allow faith-based organizations to serve people in need consistent with their moral and ethical convictions and best practices.

Protection of All Human Life

We uphold the sanctity and dignity of all human life from conception until natural death. Every day, Catholic Charities agencies serve persons who are created in God's image and likeness. Our faith tradition calls for the protection of human life and the preferential option for poor and vulnerable people including the unborn, vulnerable children, pregnant women, immigrants, the unemployed, seniors and people impacted by racial injustice.

Recommendations

- Support policies and legislation that protect all human life from conception until natural death.