

Legislative Priorities

118th Congress



About Catholic Charities USA

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) is a national membership organization representing 167 diocesan Catholic Charities member agencies. These agencies operate more than 3,000 service locations across 50 states, the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories. Last year, the diverse array of social services offered by Catholic Charities agencies reached more than 15 million individuals.

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 goodwill to do the same. For 113 years, the Catholic Charities community has advocated for just and fair policies that help individuals and families who are poor and vulnerable reach their full potential. Indeed, our Catholic tradition teaches that society, acting through government and civil organizations, has a special obligation to consider the needs of these populations.

Our Policy Priorities for the 118th Congress

We respectfully submit the following requests and recommendations for consideration to guide the 118th Congress as it works together with the Biden administration.

Poverty and Racial Justice

CCUSA and its member agencies work to alleviate and reduce the growing inequality in our society and acknowledge there are critical ways for us to take concerted action, through direct service and policy changes, toward this goal. We strongly believe that any strategy to reduce poverty in America must address the relationship between income and racial inequity, particularly with respect to housing, lending, education, hunger and employment.

Recommendations

Stronger 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 through accessible language for those who might have limited education or English proficiency.

Affirmative Action Policies in Education and Employment

- Support affirmative action in employment and education to address and rectify the pervasive discrimination and social stigma suffered by people of color and women.
- Support remedial education and job training programs.

For more detail, please see CCUSA's publication [Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good](#).

Improved Fair Housing Laws

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

Housing and Homelessness

We believe that housing (and access to housing) is a fundamental human right that recognizes the life and dignity of every person. CCUSA supports affordable housing policies across the country and provides emergency shelters and long-term assistance to vulnerable populations.

Access to Affordable Housing

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

Support Policies to Reduce Homelessness

- Support a coordinated entry system that allows service providers to identify, assess, refer and connect people in crisis to housing and assistance.
- Increase access to permanent supportive services, rapid rehousing and transitional housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Food and Nutrition

CCUSA member agencies operate specialized food programs to enhance food security among different segments of vulnerable groups, such as children during out-of-school time, when they are most likely to be food insecure. Agencies also maintain food banks, pantries or cupboards. Some also offer government bulk food distribution, mass food distribution events and other food programs such as food cooperatives, community supported agriculture and food voucher services.

Recommendations

- Reauthorize the Farm Bill (2023–2028) to include key nutrition programs, particularly SNAP (include U.S. territories), without burdensome eligibility requirements.
- Support Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation such as the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act.
- Support and expand government bulk food distribution programs (e.g., Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program).
- Extend the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) certification period; increase eligibility to 6-years-old; and allow an additional snack for full-day care.
- Ensure access to important nutrition programs for underserved communities, in particular persons of color and low-income individuals and families.

Climate Change

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

- Support the creation of an independent National Disaster Safety Board that studies the underlying causes of disasters — which are frequently the result of climate change — related fatalities and property damage nationwide. Such a board must prioritize disaster impacts on low-income communities.
- Continue to ensure that the National Flood Insurance Program remains accessible and affordable to low-income households that live in high-risk hazard areas.

Support for Disaster Relief

- Enact measures enumerated in the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act bill, introduced in the 117th Congress, and the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act of 2019, passed in the House in 2019.
- Provide appropriations for the Department of Agriculture's Emergency Grants to Assist Low-Income Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (42 U.S.C. 5177a).
- Keep current funding levels for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP).
- Provide additional funding for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and CDBG Disaster Recovery funds.

Economic Security

Poverty not only threatens the dignity of human life and the ability to meet basic needs but also threatens family stability and local communities. Catholic Charities agencies offer family income, 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

- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage.
- Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act with robust funding for wraparound services that prepare and support those with no/low income and/or a skill deficit to enter employment and thrive; funding for programs supporting apprenticeship and entrepreneurship; and expansion of access to employment, education and services for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit to make it available to all workers and families in need; expand quality early childhood services.
- Provide access to paid and medical family leave.
- Increase support for veterans and military families.
- Provide for high-speed internet in rural communities.
- Support student loan debt relief, including cancelling student loan debt.
- Ensure access to life-sustaining, affordable health care, including Medicaid and telehealth.

Support for Children and Youth

- Invest in education programs such as pre-K, Early Head Start and Head Start programs.
- Provide a child-focused paid parental leave policy. Any increases in work requirements must be accompanied by corresponding childcare funding.
- Provide effective support to dislocated youth to ensure that all children who have been abused and neglected, including those in foster care, have the services and supports they need to heal and thrive.
- Preserve and enhance quality health treatment and rehabilitation services to abused and neglected children and youth.
- Ensure stable and adequate funding for child care subsidy programs so that all families in need have access to quality, affordable child care.

Support for Seniors

- Increase funding for senior programs such as important preventive health services, home delivery of meals, transportation, Medicare, Medicaid and housing assistance.
- Fund and support Caregiver programs.
- Protect the Senior Community Service Employment Program from elimination.

Immigration and Refugee Policy

For 113 years, the Catholic Charities community has advocated for just and fair policies that help people reach their full potential, including calling for comprehensive immigration reform in a manner that promotes human dignity. Recognizing the inherent dignity of every person, our agencies serve migrants along the border and throughout the country by providing basic human needs such as food, shelter and clothing, as well as immigration legal assistance; assisting families with social work case management; resettling refugees from all corners of the world; and assisting essential workers with a range of services.

Recommendations

- Continue the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which protects from deportation immigrants brought to this country as children.
- Provide permanent legal status and a pathway to citizenship for all essential workers, including frontline healthcare and agricultural workers, DREAMERS, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders.
- Provide adequate funding for FY2024 to return the number of refugee admissions and resettlement to at least the historical average of 95,000.

- Support border security policies that are just, humane and orderly, safeguarding access to asylum and due process and ensuring coordination with state and local government and faith-based and nonprofit service providers.
- Prioritize and fully fund alternatives to detention that are trauma-informed and provide immigrants with community-based support to enable them to comply with legal obligations.

Religious Liberty

Historically, 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 ultimately 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 that serve people in need to do so in a manner 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 and tradition call for the protection of human life and the preferential option for vulnerable people and those who are poor, 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.