



Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs (DHN), a coalition representing an array of religious denominations, service agencies, and faith-based organizations, **we urge you to prioritize the most vulnerable individuals and communities in the upcoming COVID-19 relief package.** We come from a variety of faith perspectives, but our moral principles and scriptural teachings all affirm the need to prioritize vulnerable communities and struggling individuals, to welcome the stranger, and enable all people to live with dignity and the opportunity to flourish.

The CARES Act included several critical provisions that helped prevent 12 million people from facing poverty and additional hardship. The economic fallout will persist long after the outbreak subsides, but much of the assistance is slated to end before the economy will begin to recover. **To ensure an effective and sustained recovery, we urge you to enact the following policy priorities.**

1) Expand and increase SNAP

During the novel coronavirus pandemic, adequate access to nutritious food is imperative to the health and wellbeing of all people. To ensure everyone has access to the food they need we call on Congress to:

- Increase SNAP benefits by 15%
- Increase the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30
- Suspend all administrative SNAP rule changes indefinitely, during this time of economic distress and long-term recovery

2) Allocate more money for housing, homeless assistance, and extend the moratorium on evictions

Safe and stable housing is of the utmost importance in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Though the CARES Act allocated some funding to housing and homelessness services, it was not nearly enough. The next round of COVID-19 legislation must include:

- Additional support for homelessness assistance programs, USDA rural low-income housing development programs, and emergency rental assistance for those with the greatest need;
- A national moratorium on evictions beyond federally backed mortgaged properties;
- More emergency funding and flexible allowable uses for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

3) Extend expanded unemployment assistance

The unemployment benefits enacted in the CARES Act are set to expire at the end of July and/or the end of 2020. However, the depth and length of the economic downturn will leave many in need of continued assistance. We urge Congress to:

- Extend the Pandemic Unemployment Compensation Program (PUC), which provides an additional \$600 per week in unemployment benefits, beyond July 31.

- Extend the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA) beyond December 31. The PUA is available to people who have exhausted their state unemployment insurance, and people who do not qualify for the traditional state unemployment insurance. This includes the self-employed, people working in the gig economy, etc.
- Extend the additional 13 weeks of state unemployment benefits that are available after an individual exhausted their regular state unemployment benefits.

4) Expand the EITC and Child Tax Credit

We urge you to expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to make it fully available to the 26 million low-income children who today receive only a partial credit or no credit because their incomes are too low. We also urge you to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for childless workers, more than 5 million of whom are currently taxed into, or deeper into, poverty. These provisions are well designed both to provide needed economic stimulus and to bolster the income of millions of low- and modest-income families during what is expected to be a very difficult labor market through at least 2021.

5) Authorize Another Economic Impact Payment

The first round of \$1,200 economic impact payments that were included in the CARES Act provided critical fiscal relief for millions of families in need. While these payments were crucial in helping to reduce poverty, vulnerable populations were still left out. Under the CARES Act, these payments were denied to entire families if the tax filer (or spouse, if filing jointly) uses an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). Many of these families were mixed status, therefore preventing needed economic help from getting to American citizens. The next COVID package should include another round of economic impact payments that allows more Americans to access this crucial financial support.

6) Authorize Pandemic TANF

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a crucial program that helps families and individuals make ends meet and has been shown to reduce poverty among the poorest of households. During the Great Recession, a Pandemic TANF program was established to help this especially vulnerable population. Not only would it target relief to the poorest households, many households that would receive PTANF can't receive assistance through other COVID relief programs. This includes populations like immigrants, Native Americans, families fleeing domestic violence, and those who are ineligible for unemployment insurance. We urge Congress to implement another Pandemic TANF program with \$10 billion in funding that would target individuals and families earning up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Line.

This public health and economic crisis are unprecedented in scope, affecting all our communities but disproportionately impacting communities of color. As our country grapples with the ongoing violence inflicted on Black people and people of color, we know that rooting out systemic racism will require reforms at every level. This includes addressing the legacy of racist and discriminatory policies that have left people of color disproportionately in poverty.

These policies would help vulnerable families and children, especially people of color, meet their basic needs and avoid further hardship in the future. As faith-based organizations, houses of worship, and service providers, we believe these basic needs must be met, allowing individuals and their families to live

in dignity. **We urge you to include these priorities in the upcoming COVID-19 package and demonstrate your commitment to addressing systemic poverty and racial disparities.**

Sincerely,

Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice

Church World Service

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

The Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Islamic Relief USA

Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries

The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

Poligon Education Fund

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)