



Disciples Justice Ministries



Advocacy Toolkit 2020

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**Learn more about Disciples Justice Ministries and
DOCjustsummer at:**

<https://disciples.org/resources/justice/>

Share this toolkit with your friends, congregation, and region!

The Power of Advocacy

What is Advocacy?

Effective advocacy provides an opportunity to live out our faith and join with the voices of prophets and Jesus to proclaim love for the marginalized. It offers pathways to partner with the poor, seek to transform racist structures, and endeavor to influence hearts and minds by communicating faith values to policy makers and people in power. It provides chances to connect our understanding of scripture with the shaping of society. Advocacy includes activities like public education, relationship-building with policy makers, civic engagement, voter registration, and media outreach. Advocacy can lead to systemic, lasting, positive changes that help all people thrive in their communities. It is critical that we build bipartisan support by working with policy makers from both parties.

Who You Are. Why You Care. What You Want.

Your story as one who is directly impacted by policies, who knows and loves affected communities, and who is determined to share stories of your relationships is your most important qualification as an advocate. Developing relationships with policy makers, and your commitment to educating them, are necessary to impacting policy changes. It is important that policy makers understand that their constituents care deeply about, and appreciate the contributions of, the persons impacted by the policies you will discuss.

Engaging Elected Leaders

It is more important than ever to meet with your [local](#), [state](#), and [national](#) policy makers to educate them about the vital role affected communities play in your life and in your town and region. Because change takes time, engaging with policy makers should be viewed as part of a continuing process of sharing information, building relationships, and having perspectives of impacted communities genuinely considered when decisions are made that will directly affect their lives.

There are positive proposals that local elected officials can adopt to affirm the importance of the concerns and communities you hold dear. City, municipal, and other local councils and commissions need to hear your values and views. Urge your local leaders to adopt resolutions that communicate your values and care for communities who may have experienced injustice in your community. Raising your voice for the disenfranchised is especially important because individuals who oppose your views may make their voices heard loudly and frequently to policy makers. Pushing back publicly against injustice is a significant way of demonstrating your commitment to anti-racism.

How to Prepare for Virtual Advocacy Meetings

STEP 1. Learn about your elected officials:

- Are your Members of Congress in Congressional leadership, or hold particular committee leadership positions which may give them enhanced influence regarding the concerns that bring you to advocate? If so, they have jurisdiction over various aspects of the policies which bring you to advocate. (For example, the [Senate](#) or [House](#) Appropriations Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Judiciary Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Homeland Security Committees; or [Senate](#) or [House](#) Foreign Relations Committees have special influence regarding refugee and immigration concerns.)
- Research carefully your leaders' committee assignments, their leadership on committees, and the roles of their committees in the [Senate](#) or [House](#). Even if leaders aren't in leadership on committees, they can still be champions for your causes. Visit your House or Senate leaders' websites for more information about their leadership. In the US Senate, you can find these website at the form [www.\[lastname\].senate.gov](http://www.[lastname].senate.gov). In the US House, you can find their website at the form [www.\[lastname\].house.gov](http://www.[lastname].house.gov).
- You can also learn more about your governor, state legislators, mayor, & local officials [here](#).
- You will be speaking about your faith values in your visits, so learn more about the faith values of your legislator/s. You may also wish to consult studies like [this](#) from organizations such as Pew which help you to understand faith values you may encounter as you build relationships with leadership.
- What have they said about your topics for advocacy in the past? Has the member put out statements, authored op-eds, or been supportive of your issues? If they have, be sure to thank them and their staff. If they have a record of not supporting your issues, find out why. Have they cited reasons for not supporting the policies you support? If so, build your talking points to address those concerns. (Again, your House or Senate leaders' website is one good place to search for this information.)
- If you are asking your leader/s to sign on to or vote for particular pieces of legislation, go to <https://www.congress.gov/> to check out if they may already be a sponsor or signed on as a supporter of your legislation. You can also research there to re-confirm bill numbers, to see which committee a piece of legislation has been assigned to, see a description of a piece of legislation, see actions taken on any legislation, and find comparable legislation under discussion in the House and Senate.
- What issues are of interest to them? Do they often speak out on certain issues? This can help you determine what approach to take when discussing the topics in your meeting. What did they do before they were elected to Congress? This can impact their perspective. It is your job as a successful advocate to discuss topics and frame issues in a way that will resonate with them.

STEP 2. Create an advocacy team:

An ideal team consists of different stakeholder voices including directly impacted community members, persons who serve in roles connected with and knowledgeable about the communities/issues you are advocating on behalf of, faith leaders, business leaders, military veterans, multi-generational representatives, and community leaders – all who can share in the

planning, outreach, and coordination of visits and speak to the diversity of support for your concerns. Gather correct names, spellings, emails, and phone numbers for your team.

STEP 3. Outreach to elected officials' offices:

- To set up a virtual meeting, call your [Members of Congress](#), [state officials](#), or [local officials](#). Explain who you are, the denomination/congregation/organization/region you are associated with (if any), and that you would like to meet with the official virtually.
- When you contact the office to request a virtual visit by telephone or video conference, you can ask if they have a conference line, or set up your own conference line for everyone to use. Some offices are very comfortable with videoconferencing technology, but others are not. Keep that in mind when making your request, and make sure the office knows that you are available to connect in whatever way they prefer. Options for holding a remote meeting include setting up an account with [freeconferencecall.com](#), [Zoom](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Apple Facetime](#), or any platform with which you are familiar. In this virtual environment, working out these details carefully, and growing a familiarity with the chosen technology platform before the meeting, is especially important for a smooth conversation.
- It is often helpful to send a formal email requesting a meeting with the official and/or their staff. (See a sample letter below).
- Be sure to request to meet with the member directly; and if they are not available, request to meet with the staff member/s who work in the area/s most connected to the topics of your advocacy. Each member's official website (see the pattern to find the website in Step 1 above) shares the particular way to contact each office—and may well have an electronic form to use for making your request.
- If you don't hear back in a few days, send a reminder email or call again. You can also use district staff for assistance, especially if there is someone in the office with whom you have a relationship. Remember, if the official(s) themselves are unavailable, always request to meet with the staff member who works related to your topics.

Sample Email to Request Appointment (Note: Some offices may require you to complete a request form on their official website. Check the office site to be sure.)

Dear X,

My name is [name] and I am from [City, State]. As a constituent of [the official's name], I would like to request a virtual appointment with you and the [official's name] on [DATE, TIME] to talk about _____ . I offer to use [platform] to conduct this meeting, or I am open to a different platform if your office prefers. I expect to be joined by X people. [If you already know their names, you may list them—and emphasize that they are constituents of the member's state/district.]

Please feel free to contact me at [phone number and email] should you have any questions. I look forward to this "virtual" visit!

Thank you,

[Name]

STEP 4. Have a plan: Before the virtual visit, convene your advocacy team to assign roles:

- **The Facilitator**: This person starts the meeting, introduces the group, explains the purpose of the meeting, and provides time for each person to briefly introduce themselves and their organization and/or connection to refugees, to show that the group represents thousands of community members. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
- **The Personal Story**: Storytelling is key to advocacy. A directly impacted person should tell their story to show how people's lives are changed through the policies you are discussing. Consider inviting directly affected persons who may have been featured in a local news article, which can encourage policy makers to prioritize the meeting.
- **The Community Support**: Faith, business, employers, military, and community leaders briefly share how the population or policy has contributed to the social, and economic fabric of their community.
- **Specific Issue Points**: It will be helpful to bring handouts, information on your topic, statistics that help reinforce your priorities and faith values, and any publicity from your leader's state/district which reinforces your perspective. _
- **The Ask**: This is a critical part of the meeting, when you make an ask, and wait for a response:
 - **For Congress--Asks could include ones such as these below, and may ask for support /co-sponsorship of a particular bill or bills, request to support appropriations/funding priorities, urging for accountability, to join networks, etc.** Here are examples, which should be altered to match your team's topics, knowledge, priorities, and preparation:
 - Will you cosponsor the bipartisan resolution supporting refugees and resettlement, commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Refugee Act of 1980? ([H.Res.902](#) / [S.Res.545](#) / [Bi-partisan talking points](#))
 - Will you support a supplemental \$642 million for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in FY2020 through the Refugee and Entrant Assistance account to ensure vulnerable populations like refugees don't fall through the cracks and can receive housing, food, and the care they need? ([Talking points](#))
 - Will you hold the administration accountable to operating the resettlement program in good faith and restoring both the resettlement program and asylum protections to historic norms, and to welcoming asylum seekers and stateless individuals, preventing family separation, and ending detention of asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants, in favor of community-based alternatives?
 - Will you join the House Bipartisan Refugee Caucus? (*for members of the House of Representatives*)
 - **For State and Local Leaders:** Here are examples, to be adapted to your topics:
 - Will you be a champion for refugee resettlement, oppose any and all anti-refugee proposals, and help us enact pro-refugee policies?" Depending on your state and local context, ask state and local leaders to: Pass a refugees welcome resolution to commemorate World Refugee Day; and/or
 - Support workforce development opportunities for refugees, such as emergency licensing for internationally-trained medical professionals.

STEP 5. Prepare and gather:

- **Plan for your virtual advocacy visit:** Meet virtually with your team to [plan your conversation](#). Don't forget to assign roles, write down the logistical details, and time a practice session.
- **Send your “leave behinds” early:** When you confirm your visit with the staffer the day before your meeting, attach your [“leave behind”](#) materials so that they can reference them throughout your call.
- **“Arrive” Early:** If you are using your own phone or video line, gather your delegation at least 10 minutes before the call is set to begin. Take attendance and make sure the note taker has the names, cities, states, and email addresses of all participants to include in the follow-up email.

STEP 6. Follow a Roadmap like this for your advocacy visit:

- Each person introduces themselves.
- The group leader presents a “thank you” for the staffer and/or officials.
- A delegation member presents the policy / advocacy ask.
- A few delegation members share their stories and educate the official about why the issue is important.
- Ask your questions to the staffer/official. Listen to and write down their answers.
- Repeat your ask and thank the staffer again for their time.

STEP 7. Debrief:

It is important to debrief as a team in a separate location following the meeting. Be sure the member/staffer is no longer on the call as you debrief.

As a group, ask: What did we hear and learn? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps? How can we engage this policy maker in the future, perhaps through event invitations, etc.? Share this information with national justice ministry staff persons in your denomination who work on these concerns consistently. (*Contact information on last page*).

STEP 8. Follow-up:

Always send a thank you email to the staff after the meeting. Reiterate the asks and send any information they asked for and any other information you think would be helpful. To maintain the relationship, you should invite the staff and/or the official to an upcoming event.



Disciples of Christ “Just Summer” Resources

Disciples Justice Ministries have been hard at work, producing and sharing resources to multiply your opportunity to engage together in justice work through your family, congregation, and region!

June 10, 2020: [Refugee and Immigration Ministries](#), part of Disciples Home Missions | [Recording of June 11 conversation](#) | [#40for40 posts](#) celebrating Disciples’ involvement in refugee resettlement since 1980

June 17, 2020: [Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival](#). [Watch the video.](#)

June 24, 2020: [Disciples Alliance Q](#) | [RIOT worship service video](#)

July 1, 2020: [Green Chalice](#)

July 8, 2020: [Global Ministries](#) | [Video events with coworkers and partners from around the world](#)

July 15, 2020: [Disciples Peace Fellowship](#) | [Facebook](#) (Live event July 16, 1 pm EDT)

July 22, 2020: [National Benevolent Association](#) | Webinar: [The Role of Peer Groups in Creating Justice \(July 23\)](#) | [Liturgy for Immigration and Detention](#) | [Liturgy for the Families of Incarcerated People](#)

July 29, 2020: [Reconciliation Ministry](#) | [Facebook live event July 30](#) | First [“Love is an Action Word” town hall July 30](#) (7 part series – to register for future events, find the event in the [event calendar](#) and click on the registration information in each individual event listing)

August 5, 2020: [Disciples Public Presence & Center for Indigenous Ministries](#) | [Get to Know the Center for Indigenous Ministries event Aug. 6](#), 1 pm ET | [Love is an Action Word town hall Aug. 13](#), 7 pm ET | [Litany for Indigenous Justice](#)

August 12, 2020: [Disciples Justice for Children & Disciples Palestine-Israel Network](#)

July 2020 resources from Disciples Home Missions’ [Ministries Across Generations](#) for talking to children about reconciliation

Disciples Justice Ministries

In 2018, several of the justice ministries associated with the Disciples formed a grass-roots style partnership via the [Disciples Public Presence](#) Facebook group. Included are many of the members of the former justice table as well as newer interest groups. Included are as follows:

- [Disciples Women](#)
- [Green Chalice](#)
- [Refugee & Immigration Ministries](#), along with other [Disciples Home Missions](#) entities
- [Global Ministries](#)
- [Disciples Alliance Q](#)
- [Disciples Peace Fellowship](#)
- [National Benevolent Association](#)
- [Disciples Center for Public Witness](#)
- [Reconciliation Ministry](#)
- Disciples Justice and Action Network
- [Center for Indigenous Ministries](#)
- [Disciples Justice for Children](#)

Additional Learning Materials:

- Group study on justice
 - [Justice Primer](#), [Introduction à la Justice](#), [Introducción a la Justicia](#), [Entwodiksyon sou lajistis](#)
 - [사회정의 구현 입문서 및 스터디 \(연구\) 모임 가이드](#)
- [Acts of Reconciliation](#) resource page
- A [series of devotions](#) from a variety of voices across the church. [PDF](#) (67 pages)
- Variety of worship and other resources – [Well-Fed Spirit justice](#) page.
- Preaching commentary volumes on justice themes for lectionary scriptures [available for purchase](#)
- PBS Frontline [episodes](#) on mass incarceration
- [Book club recommendations](#) from Week of Compassion.

For a list of several of the current justice initiatives and programs in the Church, see the ministry links below, or go to our partner organization, the [Disciple Center for Public Witness](#).

Justice Area Resources

Find out more about the following justice areas through these links:

- Children's issues: [Family & Children Ministries](#)
- Coffee (fair trade): [Equal Exchange/Disciples of Christ Coffee Project](#)
- Immigrants/Refugees/Asylees/Farmworkers: [Refugee & Immigration Ministries](#)
- Disaster Relief: [Week of Compassion](#)
- Economic justice: [Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility](#) (ICCR)
- [Ecumenical Poverty Initiative](#)
- Ecology/Environment: [Creation Justice Ministries](#)
- Human trafficking: [Disciples Women Breaking the Chains](#)
- Legislative (national): [Rapid Response](#)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Affirming community: [Disciples Alliance Q](#)
- Health: [Pension Fund](#)
- Hunger: [Bread for the World](#) or [Society of St. Andrew](#)
- Peace: [Disciples Peace Fellowship](#)
- [Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival](#)
- War: Conscientious Objectors or [Disciples Peace Fellowship](#)

Media & Outreach Resources

Writing & Pitching an Event or Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed) Related to Your Advocacy Topic:

When drafting an opinion piece, research the outlet you are submitting to. Many have a word limit around 600, but please check the outlet's website for guidance. Feel free to use the points in the draft op-ed below as you write your own opinion article, or write directly from the heart -- what you have to say deserves to be heard!

Research what topics your media sources' editors may especially be interested in promoting.

This year, editors are very focused on how COVID is impacting every-day life. Your op-ed or event does not need to focus on the pandemic, but keep this in mind when framing it.

When pitching your event, op-ed, or other project:

- Most editors prefer pitches over email or through a submission form on their website.
- Keep your pitch on-message and as short as possible. Reporters and editors are often on a deadline and receive many pitches each day.
- Open your pitch with an interesting first line, mention how it is relevant in the time of COVID, and mention how this is a new and innovative take on current news in the community that their readership will find interesting.
- See the draft pitch below for an example email.

To increase your chances of getting media coverage for an event -- especially a virtual one -- set up an exclusive interview with one outlet. Making your event exclusive to one reporter makes it more appealing to the journalist, as they will be the first ones to "break" the story.

When pitching an exclusive story, research the outlets and reporters in your area. Who are the top current event, political, or other related topic area reporters in your region? Have they written about your subject before? If so, how can you tie your event into their previous work? Answering these questions and using them to draft your pitch will increase the chances of your welcoming event being covered and featured as an exclusive in a larger outlet.

Draft Pitch Email for Event:

Hello [USE THE NAME IF YOU HAVE IT],

I hope you are well! I wanted to let you know of a potential story opportunity about how [name your topic area] is affected during the time of COVID in CITY/STATE.

On [DATE, ORGANIZATION, CONGREGATION, REGION] will host a [EVENT TYPE, ie: virtual town hall, musical performance, etc.] with [affected population, such as refugees, immigrants, essential workers, etc.] in our community that are giving back during this dark time. They are joining together with local leaders including [LIST] to create a community that is healthy and united in the face of this pandemic.

We would like to highlight the human stories behind community members working on the front lines, particularly those serving in hospitals or elder care facilities, those making sure our grocery stores are stocked, and those volunteering to keep [CITY] vibrant. Given your past articles highlighting refugees/immigrants, I would love to offer you an exclusive interview with the group next DATE if you are interested.

I have included the invitation below with a full list of individuals participating, but please let me know if you are interested or if you have any questions.

Sincerely, NAME

Draft Pitch Email for Op-Ed

Dear Editor/Name,

As [CITY NAME] and our global community face the largest displacement and health crisis in history, our organization/congregation is preparing to do our part to create a welcoming community in the time of COVID.

Serving as a leader with ORGANIZATION, I have long witnessed the strength refugees bring to our community, something even more evident in the time of pandemic.

To mark refugee contributions to [CITY NAME] and to our [CONGREGATION NAME], I was inspired to write the below op-ed for your **exclusive consideration**. It details my experience working with refugees that are serving our community and provides a unique look into the lives of our new neighbors. In light of the toll COVID-19 has taken in our city and beyond, I think it would give your readers a positive story about resilience in the time of crisis.

As I write in the piece:

(Include short quote from the piece here that underlines the above sentiment)

Please feel free to contact me at EMAIL or over the phone at PHONE NUMBER if you have any questions or would like to discuss the piece in greater detail. I'd be happy to adapt the piece according to your needs. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely, NAME

Sample Faith Leader Op-Ed

(Adapt an OpEd to relate to the topic and populations that relate to your advocacy concerns. Make any statements as related to your own story as possible.)

Gratitude in the Time of COVID-19

In the time of COVID-19, I reflect how from the earliest days of [Sunday school/Hebrew School/Seminary], my faith has taught and called me to welcome the stranger, stand with the vulnerable, and love my neighbor. Now, as a [father, minister, and resident of STATE NAME], I am proud to demonstrate these values in my daily life and weekly sermons at [name of congregation]. But it is also because of those values that I am deeply inspired by how new members of our community are keeping us healthy and safe in the face of pandemic.

Refugees have long been some of the first to step up in times of crisis. Maybe it's because they learned the value of community on the long road to lives free from fear and persecution, but they are willing to serve and give back to those who took them in.

In recent years, my congregants and I would mark World Refugee Day by lamenting attacks on refugee resettlement. And while we continue to work together to ensure the United States does not fail the world's most vulnerable, this year our strongest emotion is one of gratitude.

[INSERT RELEVANT STORY ABOUT REFUGEES IN YOUR COMMUNITY GIVING BACK: This can be a story of a refugee serving in a hospital or elder care facility, or a refugee working in supply chains to keep food on our shelves, or a refugee family cooking food to make sure local firefighters/police officers are staying fed as they work. The more personal the better. Include where they are from and why they are here, if appropriate.]

[INSERT RELEVANT SCRIPTURE – EX: “Bring water to the thirsty, meet the fugitive with bread... For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the stress of battle.” (Isaiah 21:14-15); “And (as for) those who believed and fled and struggled hard in Allah’s way, and those who gave shelter and helped, these are the believers truly; they shall have forgiveness and honorable provision.” (Quran 8:74); “And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19)]

From the [earliest books] in the Bible and other sacred texts, our faith calls on us show mercy and hospitality to those fleeing persecution. We are called to treat them with dignity, respect, and love, providing the same welcome that we ourselves would hope for. As Americans, we live in a country built in part by the hard work, dreams, and determination of generations of immigrants and refugees -- many of whom were our ancestors.

Refugees are mothers, fathers, and children. They are doctors, nurses, and medical aides working in our hospitals and elder care facilities. They are truck drivers making sure our grocery stores stay stocked. They are factory workers making sure we have what we need. As the world searches for solutions at the nexus of the

largest displacement crisis in history and a global pandemic, we have a moral and legal obligation to those who only want to be good neighbors with lives free from fear and persecution. These people are no different than our **[Biblical]** ancestors who were once refugees who found welcome and were called to do the same.

That's why this World Refugee Day, as the pandemic makes it hard for us to find something to be grateful for, I urge you to join me in expressing gratitude to those, like **[NAME OF REFUGEE MENTIONED ABOVE]**, who risked it all to become part of our community and give back.

Sample Refugee Leader Op-Ed Template *(We adapt to make this your own story as possible/appropriate.)*

(Ideally authored by a refugee working on the frontlines of COVID-19 response in medical care, in supply chains, or by supporting community efforts to bolster public health)

In **XXXX (year)** I was forced to leave **[INSERT COUNTRY]** because of **[INSERT DETAILS OF PERSECUTION OR THREAT, OTHER DETAILS OF YOUR JOURNEY]**.

My personal story is unique, but my situation is shared by countless others who have also experienced unimaginable loss and tragedy. It is also a story of community – not just of the refugee community but of the community here in **[INSERT LOCATION]** and others across the United States that made the choice to welcome me, and those like me, to our new homes.

I'm forever grateful to the U.S. Refugee Resettlement program and **[INSERT CITY]** that gave me a second chance. In the time of COVID-19, gratitude may seem to be a rare commodity, but that's exactly what I feel, even during this public health crisis.

[INSERT DETAILS ABOUT ARRIVAL YEAR OR ANY OTHER PERSONAL DETAILS. What was it like when you arrived? What do you remember thinking, feeling? What are you most thankful for?] Through resettlement, I was able to rebuild my life and give back to my community.

In this time, I'm inspired by ways Americans are choosing to support families like mine, and I'm inspired by my fellow refugees that are showing support right back.

Like you, refugees are mothers, fathers, and children. We are doctors, nurses, and medical aides working in hospitals and elder care facilities. We are truck drivers making sure our grocery stores stay stocked. We are factory workers making sure we have what we need to fight COVID-19. We are standing by your side during this pandemic and we'll be standing right there with you when we triumph over it.

Forty years ago, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, legislation that firmly established the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program. By passing it, the United States became the world's leader on refugee resettlement. It's a program that has saved many, many lives, including my own, and was historically supported by both Republican and Democratic administrations. Unfortunately, over the past few years, our government's policies towards refugees have not reflected the compassion and generosity that I've seen in **[CITY NAME]**. Resettlement has been slashed, vital lifelines have been cut off, and lives are left hanging in the balance.

[STATE AFFILIATION, e.g. Virginians] are empathetic and gave me a new life. **[INSERT Anecdote about how you were welcomed by the community]**. That's why I'm serving my community as **[INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT WORK, ACTIVISM, VOLUNTEERISM]**.

There are thousands of other former refugees just like me all across the country working to make their communities safer during COVID-19. But beyond the virus, they are making our nation stronger. They are starting businesses, serving in the military, paying taxes. They are at once inspiring and ordinary, the kind of citizens this country needs.

In these challenging times, we must call on our elected leaders in Congress to also inspire us. They must rebuild the refugee resettlement program. Our communities and our nation will be made more prosperous and strong when we can restore policies that reflect our values and honor our promises to the thousands of refugee families who are looking for a safe place to call home. We will emerge from COVID-19 with our sense of community intact. I just hope one day the program that saved my life will do so, too.

Pass a COVID-19 Relief Bill that Increases Nutrition Assistance

Congress has passed four bills to address the COVID-19 epidemic and the subsequent economic downturn are taking a devastating toll on lives and the economy. While all four bills had important provisions, they didn't include nearly enough support for the people in our communities who are experiencing hunger and unemployment. Congress failed to increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for all SNAP households, one of the single most effective policies that helped avert a big increase in poverty during the Great Recession.

It is imperative that Congress pass another COVID-19 relief bill, one that increases SNAP by 15 percent.

- » Hunger and food insecurity are increasing at alarming rates. A recent study found that by the end of April, more than 1 in 5 households was food insecure.
- » Young children are experiencing food insecurity to an extent unprecedented in modern times. A recent study shows that food insecurity among young children is three times as high as in during the worst of the Great Recession.
- » SNAP is America's most effective anti-hunger program and one of the best ways to stimulate the economy as people spend their benefits quickly and in their local communities.
- » A SNAP benefit increase can be implemented virtually immediately.

Pass a COVID-19 Relief Bill that Increases SNAP by 15%.

Contact:
Amelia Kegan
Legislative Director
for Domestic Policy
amelia@fcnl.org

See fcnl.org/coronavirus for more information.

(May 2020)

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.)