



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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May 8, 2012

The U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

As you vote on a reconciliation package for the fiscal year 2013 budget, I would like to affirm the principle contained in the Committee Report that the “budget starts with the proposition that first, Congress must do no harm.” In this light, I urge you to ensure all policies meet the moral criteria established by the Catholic bishops of the United States to create a circle of protection around programs that serve poor and vulnerable people and communities:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects the lives and dignity of “the least of these” (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly.

I reiterate our strong opposition to an unfair proposal that would alter the **Child Tax Credit** to exclude children of hard-working, immigrant families. The bishops’ conference has long supported the Child Tax Credit because it is pro-work, pro-family, and one of the most effective antipoverty programs in our nation. Denying the credit to children of working poor immigrant families--the large majority of whom are American citizens--would hurt vulnerable kids, increase poverty, and would not advance the common good.

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), provides vital food security to families during tough economic times. It is estimated that cuts proposed in this bill would deny assistance to two million families, and cut the benefit for everyone else. No poor family that receives food assistance would be unaffected, constituting a direct threat to their human dignity. If savings in agricultural programs need to be achieved, subsidies and direct payments can be reduced and targeted to small and moderate-sized farms.

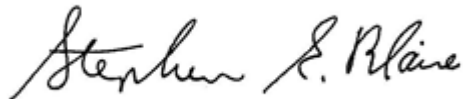
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The **Social Services Block Grant** is an important source of funding for programs throughout the country that serve vulnerable members of our communities--the homeless, the elderly, people with disabilities, children living in poverty, and abuse victims. We should prioritize programs that serve “the least of these,” not eliminate them.

The Catholic bishops of the United States recognize the serious deficits our country faces, and we acknowledge that Congress must make difficult decisions about how to allocate burdens and sacrifices and balance resources and needs. However, deficit reduction and fiscal responsibility efforts must protect and not undermine the needs of poor and vulnerable people. The proposed cuts to programs in the budget reconciliation fail this basic moral test. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states it is the proper role of government to “make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on” (no. 1908). Poor and vulnerable people do not have powerful lobbyists to advocate their interests, but they have the most compelling needs.

As you pursue responsible deficit reduction, the Catholic bishops join other faith leaders and people of good will urging you to protect the lives and dignity of poor and vulnerable families by putting a circle of protection around these essential programs and to refrain from cutting programs that serve them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen E. Blaire".

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice and Human
Development