



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development **Committee on International Justice and Peace**

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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), we call on Congress to place the needs of poor families and the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world first in setting priorities in the federal budget resolution. Decisions on how to allocate opportunities and burdens in setting budget priorities are more than economic policies, they are moral choices. Meeting essential human needs is a compelling ethical and fiscal priority. A moral measure of the budget will be how it treats “the least of these.”

Congress should outline and adopt a budget that ensures adequate funding for programs that offer opportunity and help to poor families in our country and alleviate crushing poverty and disease in the rest of the world. At home, Congress must address the consequences of the economic crisis as families lose their homes; retirement savings disappear; workers lose both their jobs and their health care; and so many people are left without hope or security. Abroad, our major priority should be a continued and strengthened commitment to effective programs of relief, development, and health care, particularly in Africa.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference offers several directions and concerns for your consideration in light of the president’s proposed budget:

- The USCCB appreciates the significant commitment of resources set aside in the president’s budget to reform the **health care** system and expand needed health care coverage. We strongly urge that Congress directs these resources to provide health care for all and assures that reform protects and enhances life and does not threaten nor diminish it.
- The USCCB supports additional **funding for federal child nutrition programs and the targeting of domestic agricultural supports** to small and moderate-sized family farm operations. The economic recession has resulted in a dramatic increase in demand for federal nutrition programs. An additional \$4 billion (\$20 billion over five years) in these programs would allow Congress to make critical improvements in access, outreach, and nutrition. Congress must continue to fully fund WIC to serve all eligible women, infants, and children.
- The housing crisis requires that Congress restore funding to programs that provide families with **affordable housing**, such as Section 8 and 202 housing programs. The National Housing Trust Fund should be fully capitalized to address the affordable housing crisis affecting every community.

- The president also commits major new resources to address the serious impacts of **climate change**. The bishops' priority is that the significant resources raised by climate change legislation should be used for public purposes, especially to reduce the disproportionate burdens on those least able to bear the impacts of climate change. The poor in the United States and around the world contribute the least to climate change. The budget and other measures must effectively provide help to poor families in the United States and in poor countries to adapt and mitigate the costs and consequences of climate change policy.
- Congress should reauthorize of the **D.C. Scholarship Program**, which allows low-income children residing in the District of Columbia to receive scholarships to attend independent and religious schools in the District of Columbia. It would be a terrible injustice to undermine this impressive and needed effort. Many more families have applied for scholarships than funds could serve. We continue to support the three-sector approach of the original appropriation that provided an equivalent amount of federal money for the scholarship program, charter schools in the District of Columbia, and regular public schools.
- The president's proposed budget increases the **International Affairs budget** for Fiscal Year 2010 by \$4.5 billion dollars over the FY 2009 level. We are pleased that a major objective is to put the United States on a path to doubling foreign assistance, which is urgently needed as the world's poor countries struggle to deal with the global financial crisis. We urge that of this \$4.5 billion increase, at least \$3 billion be allocated to poverty-focused programs, particularly HIV/AIDS (PEPFAR); development, humanitarian assistance, and emergency programs; Title II Food Aid; the Millennium Challenge Account; debt relief; and peacekeeping programs. Funds should not be diverted from these life-saving basic needs to expand the family planning budget, especially now that this budget will fund groups that perform and promote abortion as a method of family planning.
- The bishops also request \$2.05 billion for the State Department's **Migration and Refugee Assistance account**, which provides overseas assistance and resettlement aid to deserving refugees. This amount will help address the needs of millions of refugees overseas and help resettle 125,000 refugees in the United States. Correspondingly, we ask for an appropriation of \$1.16 billion for the **Office of Refugee Resettlement** in the Department of Health and Human Services to provide domestic resettlement help to refugees from abroad who settle in the United States.

Congress should pass a budget resolution that does not reduce incentives for charitable giving nor decrease support for organizations and agencies serving those in need. At this time of economic crisis, the public sector, the private sector including non-profit and faith-based organizations should continue their partnership to work for the common good of all.

We are not policy makers, but pastors and teachers. Our faith and moral principles call us to measure economic decisions on whether they enhance or undermine the lives of those most in need. Too often the weak and vulnerable are not heard in the budget debate. While they do not have powerful lobbyists, poor children and their families have compelling needs that have a priority claim on our consciences and our choices as the nation allocates limited federal resources.

The budget choices of Congress have clear moral and human dimensions; they reflect our values as a people. In his Encyclical, *God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us: "Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now." (# 28)

We urge Congress not to neglect the "least of these" in the budget deliberations that reflect our priorities and values as a nation in significant ways. Our plea is simple: put the poor and vulnerable first as you consider this historic budget resolution.

Sincerely,



Bishop William F. Murphy
Diocese of Rockville Centre
Chairman, Committee on
Domestic Justice and Human Development



Bishop Howard J. Hubbard
Diocese of Albany
Chairman, Committee on
International Justice and Peace