



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

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January 23, 2008

Secretary Henry J. Paulson, Jr.
United States Department of the Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express our hope that the Administration and Congress will work together quickly and cooperatively to shape and pass effective measures to help our nation and our people respond to growing economic stress. I also write to express our strong conviction that poor families and their children, as well as low-wage workers, should receive priority consideration in developing these plans and carrying them out.

Specifically, I urge you to find effective ways to protect the poorest families and low-wage workers from financial hardship during this economic downturn. Any economic stimulus policy must provide concrete economic help to these families. The bishops' conference continues to support strengthening existing programs, such as unemployment compensation, food stamp benefits, and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), as effective means to assist families and help the economy.

We, as pastors, and our many Catholic Church agencies working with the poor and vulnerable, know at first-hand of what we speak. We also know that, in the various proposals and positions being debated, too often the voices poor families and low-paid workers are often missing. Allow us to remind one and all, that while their voices are not always heard, poor people have compelling needs that should have a priority claim on our consciences, and on the choices and investments which you will make.

Such an approach makes practical good sense, because we all know this segment of our citizens will most likely use this money short-term within the economy. Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke told the House Budget Committee, "There is good evidence that cash that goes to low and moderate income people is more likely to be spent in the near term." Others, including the January 15, 2008, "Options for Responding to Short-term Economic Weakness," along with analysts and economists from the Department of Labor and the CBO, report that strengthening unemployment insurance, food stamps, and LIHEAP can be effective means for stimulating the economy in a timely and efficient manner.

More importantly, there is a moral argument that none of us can escape. A good society is measured by the extent to which those with responsibility attend to the needs of the weaker members, especially those most in need. A good society is one in which all benefit and none are left outside the common concern we carry together. Economic policies that help lower-income working families live in decency and with dignity should be a clear and common priority.

Permit me, in the name of the Catholic bishops, to urge the Administration and Congress to act together quickly. Keep in mind that poor working people and their families will be disproportionately hurt by this declining economy.

Be assured of our prayers for all of you as you face this challenge and respond to the needs of all the people of this great land.

With every best wish, I am,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. William Murphy, S.T.D.
Bishop of Rockville Centre
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development