



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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April 9, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger,

We write to commend you on the swift and bipartisan action you have already taken to respond to the health and economic crises our nation is facing as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. We express our appreciation for the helpful provisions that were included in the legislative packages enacted so far and offer our requests for further appropriations we believe are urgently needed.

As bishops of the Catholic Church at the service of all God's people, we stand ready to work with you to advance the common good during this global and national health emergency, including by promoting the dignity and value of all human life and by protecting poor and vulnerable people who are most at risk. Accordingly, we urge you in the strongest possible terms to use the money and policies in these bills to fund and promote life-affirming policies and not to advance the destruction of innocent human life.

As you contemplate additional emergency appropriations, we urge you to please consider the following requests, organized by subcommittee:

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FDA, AND RELATED AGENCIES

The additional resources and flexibility already given to SNAP during this crisis are very helpful. As the economic situation worsens, SNAP should be further supported to meet the growing needs of our neighbors. We ask you to raise all SNAP benefit amounts, including the minimum benefit, to address fully the deepening needs of this crisis. SNAP is an effective tool to deliver resources directly to low-income households and help families keep food on the table in these trying times. Also, we ask that the suspension of the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents Rule be extended through the full economic crisis, and the implementation of the proposed Standard Utility Allowance and Categorical Eligibility rules be suspended until people are able to get back to work.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Access to Immigration Legal Services

Extra funding should be appropriated for legal access programs such as Legal Orientation Program (LOP), Immigration Court Help Desk (ICH), and the Legal Orientation Program for Custodians of Children (LOPC). The unpredictable changes relating to closures for certain immigration court proceedings and continued operation of others has created uncertainty and has left immigration legal services short staffed and scrambling to deal with the scheduling changes. Programs such as LOP, LOPC and ICH provide information to help immigrants comply with their proceedings and are vital sources of information during this uncertain time.

Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent civil rights laws and policies require the government to take steps to address the needs of the 25 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) people living in the U.S. We request additional funding to provide in-language documents about both Coronavirus and the availability of economic support programs. Funding must also be provided to health care providers and other front-line workers who need access to interpretation services.

Prisoners and Detainees

Additional consideration for healthcare funding should go to persons in jails, prisons, and detention facilities. Facilities will need significant additional medical resources for caring for those who do get sick. Certain fees related to the criminal justice system should be waived, as well as fees for phone and video calls. Incentives and resources should be provided to states to encourage and enable them to implement these policies as well.

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT

We are pleased with the way the FCC and telecom companies have offered protection to help ensure families are not cut off from the Internet access they need to work and continue their children's education. However, increased funding is also urgently needed for the Lifeline program to reach more families without any Internet connection at all.

HOMELAND SECURITY

We ask that you include funding for provisions in any measure you take up that would automatically extend validity periods and deadlines related to documents, visas, and status for non-U.S. citizens with applications, status, or benefits processes interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, including those of non-immigrants, Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), agricultural workers, and all other similarly impacted individuals.

LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION

Catholic Education

We are very grateful for the education resources that have already been provided under the *CARES Act* and the Committee's inclusion of equitable access to aid for non-public schools and

students. Catholic schools have already been severely impacted by the virus, and many may close permanently, due to the loss of Sunday Mass collections and families who cannot pay tuition because they have lost their jobs. It is vital that Congress recognize the two hundred years of contributions of Catholic schools to the nation, but also the financial strain on the public schools systems across the country if hundreds of Catholic schools closed, sending thousands of children into the public school system.

We ask that language in any additional stimulus proposals continue to ensure that education-directed funds are shared equitably with the non-public school community, similar to the function of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* and *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

We further ask that Congress provide flexible direct aid to all families for K-12 education expenses, including microgrants to assist families in need with tools and technology to support distance learning. We also support access and funding for education savings accounts, for families to use on their education expenses. With continued uncertainty ahead, direct aid will offer parents the resources they need to ensure continuity and make up for learning losses, even into the summer.

Health Care

More resources need to go to patients of Coronavirus. While much of that can be done under the Medicaid program, which is not under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Appropriations, we ask for your consideration regarding how best to reach individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid, but have lost their jobs, and whose present situation makes acquiring private insurance for their families unaffordable. Despite the very good additional resources for healthcare providers in the CARES Act, some healthcare providers have run large losses ramping up capacity and will have to start furloughing some workers if additional help is not provided. We also encourage you to consider additional resources for training more palliative care workers and providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for front-line health care workers.

No one should fear being financially crippled by having to get treatment for this virus that is a threat to all. As you know, there is a growing body of evidence of racial disparities in Coronavirus-related infections and deaths which is deeply concerning. We hope you will think through how best to address this problem. For example, methods of care for low-income and historically marginalized communities, such as community health centers, should be given special consideration for additional resources.

Hiring and Retraining Workers

Additional provisions should be considered for workers—especially low and middle income—who are not reached by the provisions of the *CARES Act*. Policies are needed that would encourage and allow employers who have not already been helped to retain current workers and rehire those who have been laid off. The expansion of unemployment compensation is a positive measure, but as the crisis persists, families will not be able to pay bills with wages lost and will be particularly vulnerable. It will be easier for both employers and employees to bounce back after the crisis if employers can survive with their payroll intact. We understand these policy conversations are primarily happening outside of your committees but appreciate your consideration of this important area of relief.

Refugee and Entrant Assistance

As commendable as the first three measures enacted by Congress in response to the Coronavirus crisis are, some gaps in crucial public health and economic safety net programs still exist for many immigrants, refugees, asylees, and others who have migrated and live in the United States.

USCCB recommends \$642 million in supplemental funding to the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) Account. Such an appropriation would support--

- \$351 million in funding for Transitional and Medical Services, including \$295 million to expand Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance to fill unemployment and health relief gaps that populations served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) are experiencing as a consequence of the COVID-19 health and economic emergencies. It also includes \$56.3 million for the Matching Grant program, which would enable resettlement agencies to be part of meeting basic needs during the COVID-19 crisis.
- \$200 million for Refugee Support Services to support recent arrivals and other at-risk populations served by ORR who are within their first five years of arrival. Included in this amount would be programs for COVID-19-impacted groups and communities related to health, employment, housing, education, resiliency, and self-sufficiency (including at least \$16.6 million to expand the Preferred Communities Program to provide crucial case management emergency services for ORR populations of concern).
- \$91 million for ORR for further emergency health and economic response.

STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS

Faith-Based Organizations

We ask that in your next legislative package, Congress emphasize and prioritize the critical role of partnering with faith-based organizations (FBOs). Faith-based institutions have broad community recognition and are trusted by people of all faiths. Indeed, in some low-income countries Catholic and Protestant health structures provide up to a third or more of the health institutions in the country, in particular within rural areas and urban periphery.

Church institutions often have radio and other media outlets capable of passing on vital information and guidelines on how to combat the Coronavirus. Their health structures often have strong links to the Church in wealthy countries that provide institutional and financial support to complement U.S. Government aid.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) works in over one hundred of these countries with close partnerships with many Church health and development institutions.

International Debt Relief

The U.S. should support immediate debt relief through the IMF and World Bank, allowing countries in crisis to invest debt payments directly into immediate programs to halt the spread of the disease and stabilize already sparse public service systems.

International Disaster Assistance

As agencies like CRS evaluate their programs and conduct new assessments, the U.S. Government should provide additional robust support for humanitarian assistance to USAID and ensure maximum flexibility so structures and program operations can nimbly innovate to respond to the fast-changing circumstances.

This new funding should target the most vulnerable such as refugees and the displaced, the elderly, and vulnerable children. And it should continue to prioritize accounts like International Disaster Assistance, Global Health, and Migration and Refugee Assistance.

State Department Refugee and Immigration Visa Processing

In coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, ensure unaccompanied refugee children are eligible for resettlement, automatically extend validity periods and deadlines related to documents, visas, and status for non-US citizens with applications, status, or benefits processes interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, including those of non-immigrants, Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and all other similarly impacted individuals.

Rapid Deployment.

We ask that you ensure that the \$1.593 billion already allocated in the recent *CARES Act* is rapidly deployed to slow down the spread of the Coronavirus and save lives immediately.

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Housing

Those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity will need additional assistance. An expansion of the additional funding of Emergency Solutions Grants in the *CARES Act* should be considered to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. In addition, although it is good that there is an expanded suspension of evictions in homes covered by a federally-backed mortgages, emergency rental assistance and rapid rehousing for those at risk of losing their residence should be expanded. This will help ensure stable housing and avoid additional debt when so many are not able to work. Finally, additional resources should be considered for those struggling to pay a mortgage, including greater foreclosure prevention, payment assistance, and counseling.

We respectfully ask that you consider our recommendations as you craft the next phase of your legislative response. We are deeply appreciative of the steps you have taken so far to alleviate the health and economic crises caused by the Coronavirus. We offer our prayers to you, the nation, and the world as we seek to come together to respond to this scourge.

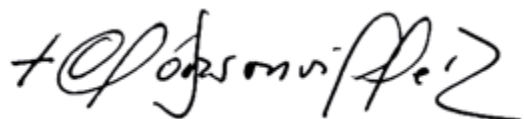
Sincerely,



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

+ Michael Barber S.J.

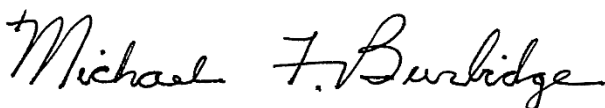
Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, SJ
Bishop of Oakland
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education

+ Mario E. Dorsonville

Most Reverend Mario E. Dorsonville
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington
Chairman, Committee on Migration

+ David J. Malloy

Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
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Michael F. Burbidge

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
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Chairman, Committee on Communications