



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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March 4, 2011

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I call on Congress to place the needs of poor, unemployed, hungry, and other vulnerable people first, both home and abroad, in setting priorities in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Continuing Appropriations Resolution. Decisions on how to allocate opportunities and burdens in setting budget priorities are more than economic policies -- they are significant moral choices. Meeting essential human needs is a compelling ethical and fiscal priority. A moral measure of the budget is how it treats "the least of these" at all stages of life.

Some current proposals call for substantial reductions, particularly in those programs that serve the poorest and most vulnerable people in our nation. In a time of economic crisis, poor and vulnerable people are in greater need of assistance, not less. Preserving national security is imperative and we need to secure our nation without worsening the insecurity of poor and vulnerable people in our midst.

It is important that our nation address the long term impacts of deficits on the health and stability of the economy. New policies and effective strategies to address the federal deficit are needed to ensure stability and security for future generations. Any just and effective policy must be a balanced approach that calls for **shared sacrifice by all**. Strategies to raise adequate revenues, eliminate unnecessary defense spending, and address the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs in a fair manner, also need to be offered and discussed. Congress should adopt a spending plan for the remainder of FY 2011 that ensures adequate funding for programs that offer opportunity and help to poor people, children, seniors, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable persons. Congress should help to alleviate their burden, not make it worse.

Protecting human life is a first requirement. Therefore I strongly support provisions that **retain all appropriations riders against abortion funding**, and that **restore a consistent ban on such funding in the budget of the District of Columbia**. I hope funds now provided to organizations that perform abortions, and to programs that promote contraceptives to unmarried minors, will be redirected to meeting the basic needs of the poor.

I offer the following directions for budget policies as examples of measures to protect the poor and vulnerable. These are some of the proposed cuts that will have a serious impact on poor and vulnerable people:

- The USCCB has long called on Congress to work to ensure adequate and lifegiving **health care** coverage to those in need. The proposed **\$1.3 billion** cut to **Community Health Centers** will deny health care to nearly eleven million poor and vulnerable people including mothers and children at risk. These centers are often the only access to health care for tens of millions of people in our country.
- The bishops affirm their long-standing advocacy for safe, affordable and decent housing. At a time of record foreclosures, increasing homelessness and rising housing costs, reductions of **\$2.3 billion** to **affordable housing programs** is not justified in light of the continuing housing crisis for low-and moderate-income families.

- Reducing **job training programs** by a proposed **\$1.75 billion** is unwarranted at a time of high unemployment and low job creation. This will prolong the economic pain of those seeking adequate training to re-enter the job market. Many of those most affected by job loss are less-skilled workers who need additional training and skill development. Congress should work to strengthen, improve and adequately fund quality training programs with successful outcomes that help the jobless find decent work.
- The proposed cuts in federal **education** programs that especially assist low-income students and students with disabilities are particularly disturbing and unwise. Efforts to cut significantly ESEA Title I, IDEA, Head Start, and Pell grants harm students who most need assistance to be successful in school or college.
- There are unacceptable reductions **in FY 2011 refugee funding** including for example: \$77 million (more than 10 percent) is cut for domestic refugee resettlement programs operated by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement and \$827 million (44.8 percent relative to FY 2010) is cut from refugee admissions and overseas refugee assistance programs in the Department of State. These reductions **would have a devastating** effect on refugees, Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa recipients, victims of torture and trafficking, unaccompanied alien children, and other vulnerable populations. Communities across the country that welcome these populations would also be affected by these cuts. At a minimum, Congress should **maintain funding for these essential programs at the current level**.

The spending choices of Congress have clear moral and human dimensions; they reflect our values as a people. Catholic Bishops are not policy makers, but pastors and teachers. I recognize that these decisions are not easy, but poor and vulnerable people have a priority claim on our limited, although still substantive, financial resources. In efforts to pass a responsible spending resolution for the remainder of FY 2011, decisions should be made that not only reflect a commitment to national and long term fiscal security, but also demonstrate justice, compassion and fairness. My plea, then, is simple: Put poor and vulnerable people first as you consider how to spend limited federal resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen E. Blaire". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of a small plus sign.

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire
Diocese of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development