



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

June 28, 2011

United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Senator:

I write to express continuing concern with the persistently high unemployment rate and the lack of economic opportunity available to jobless workers, and urge you to oppose legislation that could erode the basic financial security available to the unemployed and their families.

In 2008 Congress, rightly recognizing the enormity of the recession, guaranteed the federal government would pay all emergency and extended unemployment benefits. One provision in S. 904, the Jobs, Opportunity, Benefits, and Services (JOBS) Act, ends this federal guarantee. It would allow a state to use the money instead to pay down its debt or improve its unemployment insurance trust fund balance, rather than provide benefits to jobless workers. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that this provision would decrease emergency unemployment and extended benefits by over \$2.9 billion by the end of 2012. Currently, over four million workers receive emergency and extended benefits.

This would divert money away from financial support for unemployed workers and their families. This money has already been promised to unemployed workers.

The Catholic bishops believe strongly that the most effective antipoverty policy is decent work at decent wages. Sadly, recent job growth has not been sufficient to create jobs for those out of work. In these times, government has an obligation to protect the life and dignity of unemployed workers and their families. Blessed John Paul II, who called such prolonged economic pain “a real social disaster,” said:

The obligation to provide unemployment benefits, that is to say, the duty to make suitable grants indispensable for the subsistence of unemployed workers and their families, is a duty springing from the fundamental principle of the moral order in this sphere, namely the principle of the common use of goods or, to put it in another and still simpler way, the right to life and subsistence. (*Laborem Exercens* #18)

In addition, S. 904 would implement new education requirements for receiving benefits that could create an additional challenge for workers attempting to re-enter the workforce. While additional education certainly makes reemployment easier, access to basic financial assistance should not be conditioned on it.

The current unemployment insurance program is funded by government and employers, and it allocates resources directly to the people who need them. Unemployment benefits help the economy because recipients spend them quickly.

I urge you to oppose the provisions of the JOBS Act which would undermine the national obligation to maintain a basic level of security for jobless workers and their families.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Chairman

Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development