



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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April 22, 2021

Dear Senator/Representative:

As you consider a variety of policies that could be included in legislation on infrastructure, we write to offer a moral framework and points of emphasis for your consideration. As the bishops have written:

[I]t is the responsibility of all citizens, acting through their government, to assist and empower the poor, the disadvantaged, the handicapped, and the unemployed. Government should assume a positive role in generating employment and establishing fair labor practices, in guaranteeing the provision and maintenance of the economy's infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, harbors, public means of communication, and transport. . . . Government may levy taxes necessary to meet these responsibilities, and citizens have a moral obligation to pay those taxes. The way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice.ⁱ

In furtherance of crafting a just infrastructure policy, we submit the following:

Create Jobs for the Poor and Marginalized

Pope Francis wrote in *Fratelli Tutti* that employment is the “biggest issue” in politics, and is “the finest help we can give to the poor, the best path to a life of dignity.”ⁱⁱ As the bishops have written, it is “both good common sense and sound economics to create jobs directly for the purpose of meeting society’s unmet needs,” which include maintenance for “parks and recreation facilities,” “bridges and highways,” construction of “low-income housing,” and expansion of the “education system, day-care services, senior citizen services and other community programs.”ⁱⁱⁱ So crucial are jobs to society that “[f]ull employment is the foundation of a just economy. The most urgent priority for domestic economic policy is the creation of new jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions.”^{iv} Job creation should focus on just wages,^v include a right to organize,^{vi} and resources for job training and apprenticeship programs.^{vii} It would also be good to avoid rewarding companies that engage in anti-competitive behavior and to favor various forms of employee ownership and profit sharing.^{viii} An expanded Earned Income Tax Credit would help achieve just wages across the economy. There should be an emphasis on bringing poor and marginalized persons into the workforce, creating a net gain in jobs rather than shifting unemployment from one group to another.^{ix} In addition, policy should aim at long-term job creation and include necessary support services to help the unemployed to find and keep good jobs.^x

Ensure Safe, Decent, and Affordable Housing

The bishops have repeatedly called for “a decent home and suitable living environment for all American families.”^{xi} As Pope Francis reminds us, “[h]aving a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families.”^{xii} We ask that you work to make safe, decent housing affordable to all families and individuals. Provisions that will work toward this goal may include encouraging and funding housing production, expanding rental assistance to all

households in need, preserving public housing, investing in the national Housing Trust Fund, and encouraging equal housing opportunities for all.

Strengthen Families

A core priority in economic decision making must be “the strength and stability of family life.”^{xiii} Such family strengthening provisions include the continued expansion of the Child Tax Credit, with the credit fully refundable in order to reduce child poverty. Other helpful provisions include expanding access to in-home care for family members, ensuring quality and affordable childcare options, paid sick leave, parental leave, and other forms of support for working families.^{xiv} In addition to support for working parents, policy “should support parents’ decisions to care for their own children and should recognize the work of parents in the home because of its value for the family and for society.”^{xv} Accordingly, these strengthening policies, as well as investments in education, caregiving, and more, must never replace families but empower them.^{xvi} As “the first and vital cell of society,”^{xvii} the family also must be protected in both its structure and anthropological basis.^{xviii}

Cultivate Integral Ecology

Integral ecology recognizes that the ecological crisis is complex and demands an integrated approach “to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.”^{xix} This can include investments and upgrades in transportation, energy and building (residential, commercial, educational and public) infrastructure. Climate change should be addressed through both mitigation and adaptation efforts, with much needed investment in technological research and development. Legislation should keep in mind “the least of these”^{xx} by ensuring disadvantaged communities receive benefits from climate and clean infrastructure investments, resilience, conservation and ensuring clean water for all. As Pope Francis recently reminded us, careful attention should be given to just transition to manage the “social and employment impact of the move to a low-carbon society,” to ensure that this transition will not be harmful to the many workers and families who rely on the energy industry, and rather “can generate new jobs, reduce inequality and improve the quality of life for those affected by climate change.”^{xxi}

Welcome, Protect, Promote, and Integrate Migrants and Refugees

We believe that immigrants are a vital part of our essential workforce, the care infrastructure, our communities, and our families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this has become even more apparent; immigrants played—and continue to play—an integral role as caregivers, agricultural and food supply chain workers, and other essential workers. Consistent with the spirit of the American Jobs Plan, which treats infrastructure broadly to include both physical structures and human resources, we urge Congress to include a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, both Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders, and undocumented essential workers in its infrastructure legislation. We further request that the package include a pathway to legalization for unauthorized agricultural workers and reform the existing temporary agricultural worker visa program, in order to address current labor shortages and avoid shortages in the future. We also urge Congress to address the infrastructure necessary to provide welcome to refugees, unaccompanied children, and asylum seekers by establishing a Refugee and Entrant Contingency Fund and appropriating \$2 billion in supplemental funding for this fund. Finally, we urge Congress to take steps to provide for the pastoral care of communities

by permanently extending and making needed changes to the nation's religious worker visa program. To truly help our country recover and build a strong care infrastructure, we need immigration laws and policies that prioritize the wellbeing of all our children and families.

Respect the Rights and Dignity of Every Human Life in Health Care

The bishops have consistently offered a moral framework for policy considerations around health care: respect for life and dignity, accessible to all, honoring conscience rights, truly affordable, and comprehensive and high quality.^{xxii} The destruction of human life through abortion is not a form of health care, and taxpayers should not be compelled to fund it. Accordingly, any health policy-related provisions in the bill that could be interpreted to permit the subsidization of abortions or subsidization of health plans that include coverage of abortions must be accompanied by Hyde Amendment protections to prevent such subsidization.

Preserve Religious Liberty

The benefits of this legislation should be available to all. To that end, Congress must avoid saddling programs and funding streams with compliance obligations that operate to exclude people and organizations who hold certain religious beliefs and should affirmatively specify that an entity's receipt of funds does not authorize the government to interfere in matters of conscience, belief, or the autonomy guaranteed to religious institutions under the Constitution.

Expand Broadband Internet Access

In a time of learning and working remotely, affordable access to high-speed Internet can be the difference between irrevocably falling behind and being able to keep pace. Therefore, we support policies and funding that preserve the public's ability to learn, work, and maintain connections with family by protecting an open Internet, and ensuring that all persons have access to reliable broadband service. An important lesson of the pandemic is that the homework gap – the fact that students from wealthier families have an easier time completing schoolwork that requires online reference material – has become dangerously wider as most students continue remote in virtual classrooms. Without additional investment to ensure equitable access, we risk leaving an entire generation of children at a permanent disadvantage. Of particular importance and in an ever-expanding way, the development of every student's full potential depends upon broadband access that is reliable, affordable and equitable.

Manage Tax Revenues and Public Spending in Service of “Development and Solidarity”

The “goal to be sought” in “tax revenues and public spending” is to become “an instrument of development and solidarity.”^{xxiii} As you contemplate adjustments to the tax code, we ask that you keep in mind that the “tax system should be continually evaluated in terms of its impact on the poor.”^{xxiv} This includes the principles that “the tax system should raise adequate revenues to pay for the public needs of society, especially to meet the basic needs of the poor. Secondly, the tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity, so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation.”^{xxv} Tax burdens should not fall to the poor. Nor should they disincentivize family formation. The cost of creating new jobs should be considered in light of the expected decrease in social safety net expenses and increased revenues from the newly employed.^{xxvi}

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Sincerely yours,

- + Timothy Cardinal Dolan

His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee for Religious Liberty

+ Joseph F. Naumann

Most Reverend Joseph F. Naumann
Archbishop of Kansas City, KS
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

+ Paul S. Coakley

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

+ Michael F. Burbidge

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Arlington
Chairman, Committee on Communications

+ Mario E. Dorsonville

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

ⁱ *Economic Justice for All*, no. 123.

ⁱⁱ *Fratelli tutti*, no. 162.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Economic Justice for All*, no. 165.

^{iv} *Economic Justice for All*, no. 136.

^v See, e.g., Labor Day Statement 2018, “Just Wages and Human Flourishing” (Sept. 3, 2018), <https://bit.ly/3apqHcD>.

^{vi} See, e.g., Labor Day Statement 2017 (Sept. 4, 2017), <https://bit.ly/32vsYyv>.

^{vii} See *Economic Justice for All*, no. 159.

^{viii} See, Labor Day Statement 2019, “On the Hundredth Year of the United States Bishops’ Program of Social Reconstruction” (Sept. 2, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2Qi6nTA>.

^{ix} See *Economic Justice for All*, no. 164.

^x See *Economic Justice for All*, no. 164.

^{xi} *The Right to a Decent Home*, no. 15.

^{xii} *Laudato si’*, no. 152.

^{xiii} *Economic Justice for All*, no. 93.

^{xiv} See *Economic Justice for All*, no. 208.

^{xv} See *Economic Justice for All*, no. 207.

^{xvi} See, e.g., *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 211, 214.

^{xvii} *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11.

^{xviii} *Caritas in veritate*, no. 44.

^{xix} *Laudato si’*, no. 139.

^{xx} Mt. 25.

^{xxi} Pope Francis, Address to Participants at Meeting on The Energy Transition & Care of Our Common Home (June 14, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2P5M9vL>.

^{xxii} See, e.g., USCCB Letter to Congress on Moral Framework for Health Care During COVID-19 Pandemic (May 7, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3goGXy6>.

^{xxiii} See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 355.

^{xxiv} *Economic Justice for All*, no. 202.

^{xxv} *Economic Justice for All*, no. 202.

^{xxvi} *Economic Justice for All*, no. 162.