



February 26, 2021

Dear Representative/Senator:

As you continue consideration of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, we again ask you to consider how additional COVID relief should promote the dignity and value of all human life and protect poor and vulnerable people who are most at risk.

We support additional relief to help those in need, and the American Rescue Plan Act (H.R. 1319) contains many positive provisions that are consistent with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) priorities for additional COVID relief. Unfortunately, unlike the previous COVID relief bills, the American Rescue Plan Act provides billions of dollars for health care services through various funding streams that are not subject to Hyde Amendment protections and could therefore allow funding of abortions. We must be clear that the USCCB strongly opposes any expansion of taxpayer funding of abortion as part of this legislation. The longstanding, bipartisan, and life-saving Hyde Amendment policy must be included before this bill moves forward, and we urge you in the strongest possible terms to support amendments to this effect and to work toward their inclusion in the final bill.

The bishops of the United States continue to reject the inclusion of abortion as part of health care – domestically or internationally. Abortion directly and purposefully takes the life of an innocent person and is the antithesis of health care. No federal proposal to aid states, support individuals needing affordable health care coverage, or provide relief overseas should compel Americans to pay for the destruction of human life through their tax dollars. Our concern about the risk for taxpayer funding of abortion includes provisions in the Agriculture, Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce, Oversight and Reform, Foreign Affairs, and Financial Services portions of the legislation. In addition, we oppose the Energy and Commerce Committee's inclusion of additional funding for the Title X family planning program and those changes to the Paycheck Protection Program by the Small Business Committee that allow funding to go to Planned Parenthood, which operates our nation's largest chain of abortion centers.

We are encouraged by the provisions in this bill that are consistent with the need to help the poor and the vulnerable who need additional aid as the pandemic continues. Specifically, we commend the following provisions of the American Rescue Plan Act and highlight areas of the bill that we hope can continue to be improved or addressed through future legislation:

Hunger and Nutrition: Extends recent increases in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit amounts and investments and flexibilities in key nutrition programs like SNAP, Pandemic-EBT, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and nutrition assistance to Puerto Rico and U.S. territories not served by SNAP; provides dedicated resources for socially disadvantaged farmers and investments in addressing and preventing disruptions to the food supply chain and their impact on farmers, farmworkers, food waste, and public health. We urge you to ensure all anti-hunger programs continue to receive adequate funding and flexibility for the duration of the economic downturn.

Housing Assistance: Invests in emergency rental assistance, emergency Housing Choice Vouchers, homelessness assistance, homeowner assistance, utility assistance, and housing counseling. In order to ensure people are safely housed during the health and economic crisis, we ask that the eviction moratorium be strengthened, extended, and enforced and that a utility shutoff moratorium be enacted through the Centers for Disease Control or through separate legislation.

Health Care: Encourages affordable, comprehensive health coverage, including increases in the value and eligibility of premium tax subsidies in the Health Insurance Marketplaces and incentives that encourage states to offer Medicaid coverage to more people, including new mothers; covers COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination at no cost to patients in the Medicaid and CHIP programs and at 100 percent FMAP for uninsured patients; invests in behavioral health, including the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant program and the Community Mental Health Block Grant program; provides resources for the public health workforce, community health centers, tribal health programs, rural health care, mitigation efforts in congregate settings, management and treatment of COVID-19 outbreaks in nursing facilities, personal protective equipment, increased capacity for vaccine production, and testing and contact tracing of COVID-19; and resources to distribute vaccines and promote vaccine confidence. We ask that vaccine distribution efforts ensure availability of vaccines that are not produced in abortion-derived cell lines and prioritize communities that are most vulnerable or have experienced disproportionate rates of coronavirus infection. An increase to the FMAP for all states is still needed to ensure states and providers can continue to respond to public health needs without making cuts to other vital services.

Catholic Education: Equitable services for Catholic and other non-public schools is included in the House proposed Education Stabilization Fund. However, access to equitable services is severely limited, to only the 20% subgrant of the ESSER fund which exclusively targets learning loss. In addition to learning loss, Catholic schools must also meet the full range of diverse needs of students and teachers in almost 6,000 schools. We therefore urge Congress to include equitable services for the general ESSER Fund, as in the CARES Act. We also ask Congress to provide additional K-12 funding for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER), and for the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools Fund (EANS), which allow governors to best meet the unique education needs of the families, students, and teachers in their states. GEER and EANS are also efficiently implemented at the state level, rather than by the local education agency, which has been an advantage for both non-public school leaders and public school officials.

Employment and Income Support: Extends and expands pandemic unemployment benefits and provides resources to employers so they can retain and rehire their employees and provide adequate personal protective equipment and paid sick leave; extends resources for the Paycheck Protection Program, which has saved millions of jobs; expands the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC); provides funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program and child care stabilization grants; provides additional stimulus payments that include all dependents; expands and makes the Child Tax Credit fully refundable; enhances the Earned Income Tax Credit with extended eligibility; invests in the Pandemic Emergency Fund and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program; and promotes equitable treatment for residents of Puerto Rico with respect to income supports. We urge

Congress to extend pandemic unemployment benefits through September 30, 2021, which would decrease the risk of benefits lapsing if they are still needed. We are pleased that there are efforts to raise the federal minimum wage, which the U.S. bishops have long said is too low¹. We encourage you to raise the minimum wage to a level that allows workers to support a family.

International Assistance: We continue to urge you to provide at least \$20 billion for the international response to COVID-19 in the next supplemental package. We encourage Congress to appropriate flexible funding that supports both bilateral and multilateral efforts to purchase and distribute vaccines and PPE, and mitigate humanitarian, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic.

Safety in Prisons, Jails and Detention Centers: Invests in support for mitigation efforts in congregate settings and allows for pre-release Medicaid coverage. We encourage Congress to continue this work by passing legislation that would permit expedited review for possible release under an expanded clemency framework, such as in the provisions of the COVID-19 Safer Detention Act (S. 4034), and waive certain fees related to the criminal justice system, as well as fees for phone and video calls.

State and Local Assistance: Gives states, local governments, and tribal governments resources they need to continue to provide needed services and keep workers employed.

Charitable Sector: As charitable organizations work to meet the great need in their communities, we ask Congress to incentivize charitable giving by expanding the above-the-line charitable giving tax deduction beyond what was provided in previous legislation

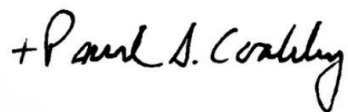
Environment: We welcome Congress' efforts to address environmental injustice, support communities who experience health disparities, and encourage additional research on the link between air pollution and coronavirus health outcomes.

Immigrants and Refugees: We continue to ask that all U.S.-citizen children be eligible for stimulus payments. We are thankful the most recent package allowed one parent possessing a Social Security Number could qualify for a stimulus payment. Unfortunately, a total of 2.2 million U.S.-citizen and legal-immigrant children remain excluded. All U.S.-citizen children should be eligible for cash payments to help ensure access to basic necessities during this crisis. We continue to request access to COVID-19 vaccinations for all, regardless of immigration status. We appreciate the funding provided in the House Education and Labor and Energy and Commerce bills dedicated to helping to ensure children served under the HHS Office of Administration of Children and Families are provided adequate care. We support the funding for FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) to reimburse localities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide future humanitarian care to migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. Finally, we urge you to incorporate the Southern Border Communities Reimbursement Act of 2021 into the agreement.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ See, e.g., Testimony of Most Rev. Stephen E. Blaire, former Bishop of Stockton and Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development Before the Senate Committee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions, June 25, 2013, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/upload/Testimony-Bishop-Blaire-to-HELP-Committee-on-Minimum-Wage-2013-06-25.pdf>.

Sincerely,



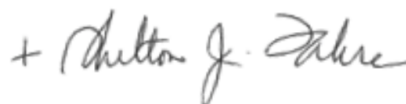
Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



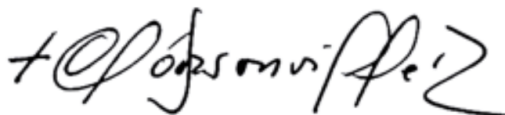
Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace



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



Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux
Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee Against
Racism



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



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