

FIRST THINGS FIRST: MUST-PASS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS

December 6, 2017

Dear Senator/Representative:

Week after week, the undersigned national organizations have watched as Congress has put off carrying out its responsibilities to address urgent priorities: continued health care coverage for our children and all low/moderate income people, emergency relief from natural disasters, continuing legal status for the Dreamers and other immigrants with Temporary Protected Status, lifting appropriations caps to prevent serious underfunding of vital programs, and enactment of full-year funding for FY 2018. Instead, House and Senate leadership has pressed forward with tax cut proposals that would make things worse for low- and middle-income people whose needs should be the focus of your attention. Our traditions and values of conscience and faith impel us to call upon you to put first things first.

As organizations representing people of faith, service providers, and civil rights, labor, and policy experts and advocates for people in need, we assess the success or failure of our leaders based on their actions to protect the most vulnerable among us, to treat all people fairly, and to invest responsibly in our shared future. Actions by Congress to address the following issues are urgently needed before you leave for the December holidays:

- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization; Community Health Centers (CHC's) Funding Extension; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) Reauthorization: CHIP serves 9 million children and 370,000 pregnant women. This extremely successful program should have been reauthorized by September 30. Now after nearly two months of inaction, states are starting to run out of funds and must notify parents that they may lose insurance for their children. Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Utah are expected to run out of federal CHIP funds by no later than the end of December, with many other states running out in the first quarter of 2018. It is unconscionable for Congress to be putting the health of millions of children at risk. Action is needed now on a 5-year reauthorization, without seeking to pay for CHIP reauthorization with cuts either in CHIP or in other important programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, or the Prevention and Public Health Fund. Similarly, the Community Health Center Fund expired on September 30, and should be extended for 5 years. CHC's serve 27 million people; if the Fund is not extended, 9 million could lose their health care. Congress should also enact a 5-year reauthorization of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV), to continue and expand its proven success in improving maternal and newborn health and development.
- Continuation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS): Nearly 800,000 people who came to this country as children are at risk of losing their legal status here because of President Trump's decision to end the DACA program by March 2018. Even before then, 122 Dreamers are being discontinued from DACA each day, a total of over 10,000 so far. There is bipartisan support for helping the Dreamers, who contribute to their communities every day through their work, studies, and service. Congress must act to protect these young people through passage of the DREAM Act, without unacceptable

conditions that will harm others. We also call upon you to urge the Administration to continue or reinstate Temporary Protected Status for 320,000 people from Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Nepal, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. They came here fleeing violence and/or natural disaster, and the countries they left are still dangerous and unable to cope with their return. Many have been here for decades, are contributing to their communities, and have U.S. citizen children. Deporting them would cause the U.S. to lose \$164 billion in GDP. Please stand against endangering them and against splitting parents from children.

- Provide urgently needed relief and recovery for Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Texas, Florida, and for communities hit by wildfires: The devastation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands is unprecedented. Half of Puerto Rico remains without electricity with at least 472,000 homes destroyed or damaged; public health remains at high risk. Hundreds of billions of dollars will be needed to assist with the recovery for all places recently afflicted by these natural disasters, and Congress needs to provide much more than its initial efforts, and must do so quickly. The Trump Administration's recent request is grossly inadequate, and especially inequitable in requiring these emergency services to be paid for through cuts to other programs. Budget law rightly exempts emergency funding from being paid for, to ensure a swift and adequate response. Just as Louisiana was temporarily spared having to pay Medicaid reimbursement after Hurricane Katrina's devastation, Puerto Rico should be relieved of paying towards Medicaid during its recovery period.
- Lift sequester caps in a bipartisan approach to allow more adequate funding for domestic and international priorities, not just for the military; enact omnibus spending legislation without poison pill riders: The CR will expire on December 8. Congress needs to enact a bipartisan bill to lift the sequester caps for at least two years before an omnibus spending bill can be completed. Such legislation should adhere to the "parity principle" that has guided past sequestration deals by providing equal sequester relief for defense and non-defense accounts. Without lifting the caps, we cannot make the investments we need in housing, education, job training, child care, Head Start, public health and safety, and infrastructure. The Census Bureau requires more funding to carry out an accurate 2020 Census, vital for a fair distribution of federal grants to states and for accurate redistricting. We will be unable to provide adequately for Meals on Wheels and other nutrition programs, home heating and cooling assistance, substance use disorder and mental health services, and assistance for people with disabilities. Lifting the caps equitably must be a top priority for Congress, so that it can proceed as quickly as possible to enact an omnibus spending bill for the rest of FY 2018. An adequately funded omnibus will allow investments that will provide for economic growth and opportunity, and should not be undermined by divisive poison pill riders. It is vitally important that increases in appropriated spending are not paid for by cuts that would reduce or eliminate essential services provided by programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, the Affordable Care Act, SNAP, the Social Services Block Grant, SSI, and other entitlement programs.

Carrying out your responsibilities in these critical areas should be Congress' top priorities in the weeks ahead. It is simply unacceptable to let time run out on essential funding and protections for vulnerable people. Please work actively to ensure that the items listed above are enacted, free-standing or in other legislative vehicles, before Congress leaves in December.

Sincerely,

Adorers of the Blood of Christ

African American Health Alliance

AFSCME

AIDS United

Alliance of Baptists

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Friends Service Committee

American Muslim Health Professionals

Appalachian Independence Center, Inc.

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living

Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore

Bread for the World

Campaign for Youth Justice

Center for Community Change Action

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Medicare Advocacy

Child Care Aware of America

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Leadership Council
Children's Advocacy Institute
Christian Reformed Church in North America, Office of Social Justice
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Learning Partnership
Community Resource Exchange
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity, US Provinces
Daughters of Charity - USA
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Doctors for America
Endangered Species Coalition
Every Child Matters
Family Focused Treatment Association
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Generations United
Global Justice Institute
HCAN
Healthy Teen Network
HEAR US Inc.
HIV Prevention Justice Alliance
Homeowners Against Deficient Dwellings
Interfaith Worker Justice
Justice in Aging
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
LIFT
Meals on Wheels America
NAKASEC

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (NASOP)
National Birth Defects Prevention Network
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Domestic Violence Hotline
National Employment Law Project
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Housing Law Project
National Immigration Law Center
National Juvenile Justice Network
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization for Women
National Rural Education Association
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Progressive Alliance
NMAC

People Demanding Action

People For the American Way

PolicyLink

Poligon Education Fund

Progressive Congress Action Fund

Project Inform

ProLiteracy

Protect All Children's Environment

Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator (Viatorians)

Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition

RESULTS

Ryan White Medical Providers Coalition

Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership

Sisters of Charity, BVM

Sisters of Mercy South Central Community

Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Tax March

Teach Plus

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

The Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

Treatment Action Group

U.S. Breastfeeding Committee

UnidosUS

Union for Reform Judaism

Union Of Presentations Sisters

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

Voices for Progress

YWCA USA

ZERO TO THREE