

May 18, 2023

The Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House of Representatives
US House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear President Biden and Speaker McCarthy,

On behalf of the 30 undersigned faith organizations representing people of faith across religious traditions and denominations, we write today to urge you to protect critical anti-poverty programs - food, healthcare, income supports, and housing - that help the most vulnerable to thrive in final negotiations related to the debt ceiling crisis. It is imperative that programs addressing the most fundamental tools needed to live in dignity and with security are protected and strengthened.

Everybody needs an affordable place to call home, healthcare to prevent illness and to heal when sick, and nutritious food to grow and sustain life. No one should have to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table or paying for medications. Without assistance to meet these basic needs, policymakers cannot expect struggling communities to prosper or our economy to grow in a way that offers our children and families stability, particularly during periods of high inflation.

Faith organizations minister to meet our communities' spiritual and temporal needs. Our places of worship are often at the forefront of efforts to provide food, shelter, and basic services to those facing an emergency. This work, however, is done in partnership with the federal government. Without government assistance, we cannot meet the basic needs of those in poverty. Charity is important, but it cannot replace just economic systems.

At this time, our request of policymakers is simple: resist any and all proposals to weaken access to food, shelter, income supports, and health care from cuts or structural change. We are all too aware of rhetoric from some that would target programs that protect individuals living in poverty and facing low wages, disability, old age, job cuts, and childcare obstacles. There is no economic challenge facing the country that can be morally or practically solved on the backs of those in our society who have the least. Creating more bureaucratic hurdles to programs to which taxpayers are entitled only makes those programs harder to access. There is no evidence that time limits and more red tape encourage greater employment. Evidence does show, however, that these barriers restrict access and cause great harm.

We appreciate programs must be sufficient and sustainable; we believe, however, it is immoral to balance the budget on the backs of the poor. Instead, we must insist that the wealthy and corporations simply pay their fair share in taxes. Policymakers should also look to

prevent waste in other spending programs, most notably, military spending, tax evasion by the wealthy, and benefits lavished on large corporations.

We urge you to join communities of faith across our country in resisting any legislation that would force our children, families, and communities struggling with poverty into economic devastation.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee
Bread for the World
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hindus for Human Rights
Islamic Relief USA
Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology
National Council of Churches
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Missionary Oblates
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Churches
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Poligon Education Fund
Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Church of America
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Justice Team
Sojourners
The Episcopal Church
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

cc: Senate Majority Leader Schumer, Senate Minority Leader McConnell, and House Minority Leader Jeffries