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2050 Ballenger Avenue  
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April 24, 2017

United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

In a time of great uncertainty for many, those struggling on the margins must be among our highest national priorities. As federal spending decisions for Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations are finalized, we urge you to draw a “circle of protection” around the many programs that serve the poor and those on the peripheries. It is imperative that you oppose proposed damaging cuts or structural changes to domestic anti-poverty programs that would undermine assistance to people in need. The prospect of a dramatic increase in defense spending coupled with simultaneous and severe reductions to non-defense discretionary spending, especially on programs that serve the poorest and most vulnerable, is deeply troubling. If Congress increases defense spending, there ought to be corresponding increases in spending on programs for those most in need.

As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*, all of us are in need of a new perspective, including those charged with fostering a just political order:

[W]e can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. . . .[Solidarity] presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. (No. 188)

Despite general improvement, **1 in 5 children** continues to live in poverty. Recent federal data shows that **15.8 million** U.S. households continue to suffer from food insecurity, including **3 million** households with children. The Bishops of the United States and their Catholic Charities agencies see the realities of poverty as our ministries serve over **8.2 million** people each year.

Domestic nutrition programs that help hungry people must be protected and fully funded. Programs such as **The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**, **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, and **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)** help vulnerable children, pregnant women, seniors, and persons with disabilities impacted by hunger and food insecurity.

In light of the continuing affordable housing crisis in our nation, Congress should provide adequate funding for **Housing for the Elderly (Section 202)**, **People with Disabilities (Section 811)**, **People with AIDS (HOPWA)**, **Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH)**, **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance** and other programs that serve vulnerable households and communities.

We welcomed the bipartisan support for funding these programs during Committee considerations and urge their continued protection and full funding during year-end discussions. At the same time, greater priority should be given to the following programs which still lack needed support and which have a proven history of supporting the poor and vulnerable in our communities:

- **Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance:** The number of families that struggle to pay rent and make ends meet has increased dramatically over the past decade with only 1 in 4 eligible families receiving federal rental assistance. Over the past two years, housing agencies have restored tens of thousands of vouchers that were cut in the wake of the 2013 sequestration. However, to build upon this progress, additional resources are needed to ensure that those receiving support continue to receive it.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** Provides critical flexible funding to local governments to tackle challenges facing their communities. Programs such as Meals on Wheels and grants to develop and preserve decent and affordable housing are critical components to fostering local solutions for addressing poverty. Reject dramatic cuts in the program and robustly fund it so that communities can continue to work to find local solutions to poverty.
- **Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP):** Provides critical local temporary food, shelter and rental assistance support to families facing economic crisis. The program is a unique public-private partnership that allows local communities to identify their needs and provide support where needed. While EFSP played a heightened role during the Great Recession of 2008, Congress cut the program's funding by 40 percent beginning in Fiscal Year 2011 (from \$200 million to \$120 million, annually). We therefore urge you to support the amount approved by the House Appropriations Committee (\$120 million) in H. Rept. 114-668 on June 22, 2016.
- **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Grants:** Retention of funding for the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Part B Formula Grants under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is vital. This program helps states to reform their juvenile justice systems and gathers data and research to assist in evaluation. The funding reaches approximately a quarter of a million juveniles each year, and 86% of youth served exhibited some desired change in behavior. In 2014, only 9% of youth offended or re-offended during the reporting period. This program should receive funding at the level of \$63 million. Proposals which would cut unrelated Department of Justice funding for communities providing support to immigrants and their families are of deep concern as well. Individuals returning to communities following incarceration rely on these programs to help successfully make the transition back into society.

The human consequences of budget and funding choices are evident to us in our daily work. Our Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. These voices are too often missing from public policy debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our limited resources.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane  
Bishop of Venice  
Chairman  
Committee on Domestic Justice and  
Human Development



Sr. Donna Markham, OP, Ph.D.  
President and CEO  
Catholic Charities USA



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House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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