



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

March 19, 2021

Dear President Biden:

We write to you as the Circle of Protection, a coalition of church bodies and related ministries representing the diversity of Christianity in this country - Latino Churches, Historic Black Churches, Protestants and Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches, Pentecostals, and Peace Churches. Together, the church bodies in the Circle of Protection have close to 100 million members. We are united across theological, sociological, and political differences by our shared Christian faith and the motivation it inspires to make our nation and world more consistent with the fact that God loves everyone.

Thank you for your leadership on the American Rescue Plan. This legislation will provide critical relief to millions of people struggling with the pandemic and its economic fallout. You have also been clear that relief is not enough. The COVID pandemic has exacerbated already alarming levels of poverty, racial injustice, and inequality in our nation. We need to shift toward an economy that allows all people to thrive and protects the environment that sustains us. This will require concrete steps to address the legacy of racial injustice in the U.S. and commitment to rectify the structural inequalities experienced by so many, especially communities of color. We believe that God has high hopes for our country and the world, and we pray for positive, visionary leadership from all of our elected leaders.

We need change on many fronts, but we all see action on the following issues as priorities for your forthcoming Build Back Better legislation:

Adopt policies that will provide liveable-wage jobs for all workers. Both parties agree that good jobs are the most durable, dignified way for people to keep their families out of poverty. The two parties have worked together on fiscal stimulus during the pandemic. The American Rescue Act expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in ways that will make work pay for more workers. It expanded the Child Tax Credit (CTC) in a way that will dramatically reduce child poverty without reducing incentive for paid work. Now you and Congress need to **extend the temporary expansion of the EITC and CTC**. We welcome bipartisan support for a major improvement in **U.S. infrastructure** and, more specifically, your proposals for infrastructure that will lead to environmentally sustainable and more equitable economic growth. **The program of subsidized jobs that was included in the 2009 stimulus package** had good results and should be revived. We support an **increase in the minimum wage**. Nationwide access to **affordable high-speed internet** (especially in impoverished rural areas) and **public transit** between low-income communities and employment opportunities will allow many struggling families to raise their earned incomes.

Fund programs that support families and keep people out of poverty. Houses of worship are often on the front lines in providing shelter and urgent services of those of us struggling with homelessness. Our churches recognize the need for substantial government funding for **housing** - to rebuild the nation's housing infrastructure, close disparities in home ownership, and end homelessness. This will include investments in affordable housing, rental assistance, and funding for tribal housing. Many people experiencing homelessness need both affordable housing and support services. Home ownership among communities of color is still limited by "red-lining," and we need to eliminate racial discrimination in financial services. While the Rescue Act took important steps to combat hunger, we also need to invest

more in **nutrition programs**, especially to maintain the current benefit level of SNAP and end time limits. Finally, we strongly support **expanded educational opportunity for all young people**. We are deeply worried about the ways in which the COVID pandemic has widened racial and economic achievement gaps and left many of the most vulnerable children in our nation even further behind.

International aid. Hunger, poverty, and conflict are destabilizing forces that threaten peace and prosperity. These problems have surged during the pandemic, and very few people have been vaccinated in low-income countries. As long as COVID-19 continues to rage worldwide, more variants will emerge and threaten people everywhere. More resources are needed, especially emergency health assistance, humanitarian aid, and economic relief. Strong U.S. leadership is also needed to address threats to human rights, democracy, and sustainable development.

Increase taxes on corporations and high-income Americans. The growing chasm in the distribution of wealth in our country runs counter to our loving God's intentions for us. The God of the Bible urges nations to care for people in need and objects to extreme concentrations of wealth. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets spoke out about the contrast between luxurious homes and the neglect of people in poverty. Jesus condemned the well-dressed rich man who "dined sumptuously every day" while a poor man named Lazarus languished outside his gate. To reduce the risk of financial problems in the future, we should fund some of the great needs our nation faces now with increased revenue. Our shared conviction on this controversial point is grounded in Jesus' teaching, "From those to whom much has been given much will be required." Specifically, you and Congress should **roll back the 2017 tax cuts**. An estimated 83% of the benefits from the 2017 tax bill will go to the top 1% of the income distribution.

The pandemic has made the ongoing hardship suffered by many Americans more severe and visible. Child hunger in America and the wealth of the richest people have both increased at the same time. A series of violent weather events have made climate change harder to ignore. The events of January 6 have shaken us to be ever more vigilant in our defense of democracy for all of God's children. The Hebrew prophets were clear that nations sometimes need to make big changes, and we think now is such a time.

We are sending a copy of this letter to each member of Congress. We pray for you and for all of them.

Rev. Dr. Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Rev. David Beckmann, President Emeritus, Bread for the World

Galen Carey, Vice President of Government Relations, National Association of Evangelicals

John Carr, Director, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University

Rev. Eugene Cho, President, Bread for the World

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

Rev. Carlos L. Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together

Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA

Diane Randall, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Amy Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Adam J. Richardson, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President and Founder, National Latino Evangelical Association

Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada

Rev. Adam Taylor, President, Sojourners

Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder and Ambassador, Sojourners

Rev. Cecilia Williams, President and CEO, Christian Community Development Association

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, CEO, Skinner Institute, and Co-Convener of the National African American Clergy Network

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary, National Council of Churches