



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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December 6, 2010

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Representative:

As you complete your business and prepare to adjourn the 111th Congress, I urge you to advocate policies and priorities that protect vulnerable communities, especially low-income families and children.

For years, the Catholic bishops have been strong supporters of the refundability and expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit particularly because of their effectiveness in helping families escape or prevent poverty and offer essential resources for raising children. Low- and middle-income working families would see their economic security severely threatened if the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit are not maintained in their current forms. This includes the important changes made in 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and they should not be abandoned now.

Presently, the Refundable Child Tax Credit and expanded Earned Income Tax Credit encourage work and family life. Both of them focus on earned income, and the recent Earned Income Tax Credit reforms relaxed the “marriage penalty” for low-income, married workers filing jointly. To keep in place tax cuts for more affluent families while ending the tax help for those families in greatest need would be bad policy and unjust. For example, a low-income family with two children, with one income at the minimum wage (\$15,000 a year), stands to lose roughly \$1,400 if the 2009 Child Tax Credit reform is eliminated. In such an economic climate, a promise to raise taxes on no one must include low-income families.

The Child Tax Credit should be maintained in such a way as to maximize the benefit to low- and middle-income families by keeping in place the refundability of the current provisions. Likewise, Earned Income Tax Credit reforms that relaxed the “marriage penalty” and enhanced the benefit for families with three or more children must be protected.

On a related matter, this past Friday the Department of Labor released a sobering unemployment report: the number of unemployed people climbed back over 15 million, and the rate rose to 9.8 percent. Pope John Paul II, who called such prolonged and pervasive economic pain “a social disaster,” said:

The obligation to provide unemployment benefits, that is to say, the duty to make suitable grants indispensable for the subsistence of unemployed workers and their families, is a duty springing from the fundamental principle of the moral order in this sphere, namely the principle of the common use of goods or, to put it in another and still simpler way, the right to life and subsistence. (*Laborem Exercens* #18)

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The bishops believe strongly that the most effective antipoverty policy is decent work at decent wages; however in such an extraordinary economic circumstance, Congress has a moral obligation to protect the life and dignity of unemployed workers and their families. Therefore, I strongly urge that effective ways be found to assure continuing Emergency Unemployment Compensation to protect jobless workers and their families.

As you deliberate important tax questions, I urge you to consider the moral consequences of your decisions on the most vulnerable among us, especially low-income families and children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen E. Blaire". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and 'B'.

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire

Chairman

Committee on Domestic Justice and Human
Development