



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • FAX 202-541-3339

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG

November 17, 2014

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

As you consider federal spending and tax legislation, especially with an eye toward addressing the damaging policy of sequestration, we urge you to draw a “**circle of protection**” around the many programs that serve poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad. As the 113th Congress concludes, the Catholic Bishops of the United States will express views and encourage action on a variety of other important issues in separate correspondence. We stand ready to work with leaders of both parties to protect poor and vulnerable people, promote human life and dignity, and advance the common good.

We have consistently supported the goal of reducing future unsustainable deficits, and insist that it be pursued in ways that protect poor and vulnerable people. We again offer three criteria to guide difficult budgetary choices:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects “the least of these” (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, including ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity, especially in difficult economic times.

A just framework for spending and tax priorities cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all, raising adequate revenues, addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly, and eliminating unnecessary spending when possible, including on the military, nuclear weapons, and agricultural subsidies. As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*: “I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans?” (#205)

Recent data show that close to 18 million U.S. households continue to suffer from food insecurity, including ten million households with children. We urge you to resist cuts and the type of structural changes to domestic nutrition programs that will harm hungry people. 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.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, only 1 in 4 low-income households that qualifies for housing assistance actually receives it. In light of this extraordinary unmet need, Congress should provide robust funding for **Housing for the Elderly (Section 202)**, **People with Disabilities (Section 811)**, and **People with AIDS (HOPWA)**, **Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH)**,

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance, Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance, Community Development Block Grant, and other programs that serve vulnerable Americans.

Other programs that ensure low-income people and communities have access to the resources they need to flourish, such as **Community Health Centers, Head Start, mental health services,** and **workforce development programs,** also merit protection. The **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** remains an important part of the social safety net, and its continuation should be ensured.

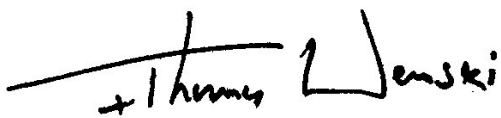
The persistently high child poverty rate in this country would be even worse were it not for the **Earned Income Tax Credit** and the refundable portion of the **Child Tax Credit.** Taken together, they reduce child poverty 6.4 percentage points--by far the most effective means the government has for doing so. Both, however, are scheduled to be rolled back. Congress should move swiftly to prevent millions of children from falling into (or more deeply into) poverty, by making permanent recent expansions and improvements to both programs.

We have concerns regarding the effect of budget constraints on international programs as well. Americans are a generous people, but our international assistance ranks near the bottom of donor countries as a percentage of national income. On average, donor countries give 0.45 percent of gross national product; the United States gives only 0.2 percent. We can do better. Most Americans assume we give much more.

Poverty-focused international assistance programs promote human dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance sustainable global stability and security. These programs--less than 1 percent of the federal budget--have always enjoyed bipartisan support. At a time of multiple crises, expanding **humanitarian and disaster assistance** is critical. This is particularly true for the Ebola crisis, where it is important to increase funding in accordance with the Administration's request. **Long-term development programs** are helping families and communities to step out of poverty by providing access to water, basic education, and other resources necessary to protect and promote human dignity. International food assistance funded through agriculture appropriations programs--namely **Food for Peace, McGovern-Dole Food for Education, and Local and Regional Procurement**--are also a critical part of such development.

As pastors, we see every day the human consequences of budget choices. 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 common resources.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic
Justice and Human Development



Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on
International and Peace



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United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

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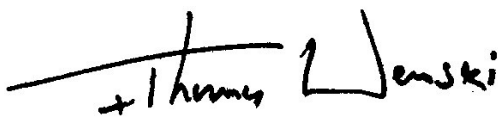
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