



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • FAX 202-541-3339 • WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD

March 7, 2019

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to address the moral and human dimensions of the federal budget debate. Congress and the Administration face significant budgetary decisions for Fiscal Year 2020, especially with the possibility of sequester-related budget caps. We urge wise bipartisan leadership and moral clarity in crafting a plan to ensure the government continues to operate and meet its responsibility to protect human life and dignity, care for poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad, and advance the common good.

We continue to recommend three moral criteria to help guide budgetary decision-making:

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” (Mt 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, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons. It requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly. Congress and the administration must come together to reach a new budget agreement that is responsible and safeguards the essential discretionary programs that serve vulnerable people. Without this agreement, discretionary funding levels will return to austere levels required by the 2011 Budget Control Act, putting non-defense discretionary programs at risk of deep cuts.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* unambiguously states it is the proper role of government to “make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on” (no. 1908). Although our economy has improved in recent years, especially in the area of unemployment, there remain millions of Americans who struggle to meet these basic needs. A significant reason for this is a lack of jobs that pay a just wage that can support a family. Most wages, especially towards the bottom of the economic spectrum, have been stagnant for decades. As a result, almost one in three Americans have a family income below 200% of the federal poverty line,¹ and roughly four in ten adults do not have the savings to cover a \$400 emergency expense.² It is good that more people can find work than in recent

¹ U.S. Dep’t of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2017*, 18 (Table 5) (Sept. 2018).

² Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017*, 21 (May 2018).

years, but lower and minimum wage work is still not sufficient to support a family. As one recent study pointed out, in all fifty states, a full-time minimum wage salary is not enough to afford an average two-bedroom apartment.³

In addition, millions more around the world rely on the United States for lifesaving food, medicine, and support. In 2019, experts project more than 132 million people will need humanitarian assistance, including 68 million people who have been forcibly displaced, 25.4 million of them refugees. U.S. contributions to humanitarian aid, durable solutions for those forcibly displaced, and investments in long term development, lifegiving global health, and food security programming are critical not only to meet the basic needs of the poor and the marginalized, but also to establish a foundation from which communities can lift themselves out of poverty. Protracted and emerging crises in countries such as Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and Venezuela exacerbate human suffering and destabilize communities and regions. U.S. efforts to promote just and peaceful societies demand a strong diplomatic corps and funding for democracy, governance, and peacebuilding activities. This work needs to continue, and human dignity upheld.

For the FY 2020 budget, we ask that you ensure that if sequestration caps go into effect, that non-defense discretionary spending cuts are not made to the programs that are relied upon by the poor and vulnerable. Although we respect the government's efforts to address deficit concerns, we do not believe that budget cuts should come from those with the least to give and the most to lose.

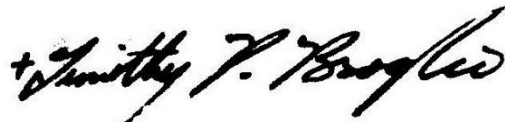
In his Message to the Second World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis drew our attention to scripture, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." (*Ps* 34:6). The Holy Father noted that often, the poor "are considered not only destitute but also a source of insecurity and unrest, an unwelcome distraction from life as usual and needing to be rejected and kept afar."⁴ But distancing ourselves from the poor, in reality, means that "we are distancing ourselves from the Lord Jesus, who does not reject the poor, but calls them to himself and comforts them."⁵

We appreciate the bipartisan efforts that went into reopening the government and safeguarding its efforts to support the poor and vulnerable both at home and abroad. We are ready to work with leaders of both parties to promote a budget that protects poor and vulnerable people, recognizes the dignity of all, and promotes peace and the common good.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Rev. Timothy P. Broglio
Committee on International Justice
and Peace

³ Tracy Jan, "A minimum wage worker can't afford a 2-bedroom apartment anywhere in the U.S.," *The Washington Post* (June 13, 2018).

⁴ Pope Francis, Message for the Second World Day of the Poor, no. 5 (Nov. 18, 2018), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/papa-francesco_20180613_messaggio-ii-giornatamondiale-poveri-2018.html.

⁵ *Id.*



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • FAX 202-541-3339 • WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD

March 7, 2019

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to address the moral and human dimensions of the federal budget debate. Congress and the Administration face significant budgetary decisions for Fiscal Year 2020, especially with the possibility of sequester-related budget caps. We urge wise bipartisan leadership and moral clarity in crafting a plan to ensure the government continues to operate and meet its responsibility to protect human life and dignity, care for poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad, and advance the common good.

We continue to recommend three moral criteria to help guide budgetary decision-making:

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” (Mt 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, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons. It requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly. Congress and the administration must come together to reach a new budget agreement that is responsible and safeguards the essential discretionary programs that serve vulnerable people. Without this agreement, discretionary funding levels will return to austere levels required by the 2011 Budget Control Act, putting non-defense discretionary programs at risk of deep cuts.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* unambiguously states it is the proper role of government to “make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on” (no. 1908). Although our economy has improved in recent years, especially in the area of unemployment, there remain millions of Americans who struggle to meet these basic needs. A significant reason for this is a lack of jobs that pay a just wage that can support a family. Most wages, especially towards the bottom of the economic spectrum, have been stagnant for decades. As a result, almost one in three Americans have a family income below 200% of the federal poverty line,⁶ and roughly four in ten adults do not have the savings to cover a \$400 emergency expense.⁷ It is good that more people can find work than in recent

⁶ U.S. Dep't of Comm'r, U.S. Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2017*, 18 (Table 5) (Sept. 2018)

⁷ Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017*, 21 (May 2018).

years, but lower and minimum wage work is still not sufficient to support a family. As one recent study pointed out, in all fifty states, a full-time minimum wage salary is not enough to afford an average two-bedroom apartment.⁸

In addition, millions more around the world rely on the United States for lifesaving food, medicine, and support. In 2019, experts project more than 132 million people will need humanitarian assistance, including 68 million people who have been forcibly displaced, 25.4 million of them refugees. U.S. contributions to humanitarian aid, durable solutions for those forcibly displaced, and investments in long term development, lifegiving global health, and food security programming are critical not only to meet the basic needs of the poor and the marginalized, but also to establish a foundation from which communities can lift themselves out of poverty. Protracted and emerging crises in countries such as Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and Venezuela exacerbate human suffering and destabilize communities and regions. U.S. efforts to promote just and peaceful societies demand a strong diplomatic corps and funding for democracy, governance, and peacebuilding activities. This work needs to continue, and human dignity upheld.

For the FY 2020 budget, we ask that you ensure that if sequestration caps go into effect, that non-defense discretionary spending cuts are not made to the programs that are relied upon by the poor and vulnerable. Although we respect the government's efforts to address deficit concerns, we do not believe that budget cuts should come from those with the least to give and the most to lose.

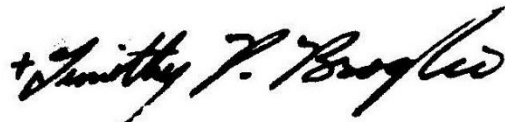
In his Message to the Second World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis drew our attention to scripture, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." (*Ps* 34:6). The Holy Father noted that often, the poor "are considered not only destitute but also a source of insecurity and unrest, an unwelcome distraction from life as usual and needing to be rejected and kept afar."⁹ But distancing ourselves from the poor, in reality, means that "we are distancing ourselves from the Lord Jesus, who does not reject the poor, but calls them to himself and comforts them."¹⁰

We appreciate the bipartisan efforts that went into reopening the government and safeguarding its efforts to support the poor and vulnerable both at home and abroad. We are ready to work with leaders of both parties to promote a budget that protects poor and vulnerable people, recognizes the dignity of all, and promotes peace and the common good.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Rev. Timothy P. Broglio
Committee on International Justice
and Peace

⁸ Tracy Jan, "A minimum wage worker can't afford a 2-bedroom apartment anywhere in the U.S.," *The Washington Post* (June 13, 2018).

⁹ Pope Francis, Message for the Second World Day of the Poor, no. 5 (Nov. 18, 2018) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/papa-francesco_20180613_messaggio-ii-giornatamondiale-poveri-2018.html.

¹⁰ *Id.*