



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

November 1, 2017

Dear Members of Congress,

The Circle of Protection is an unprecedented group of Christian religious leaders from all the major families of Christianity. We care deeply about many issues facing our country and world, but ending persistent hunger and poverty is a top priority that we all share. These are biblical and gospel issues for us, not just political or partisan concerns. In Matthew 25, Jesus identified himself with those who are immigrants, poor, sick, homeless and imprisoned, and challenged his followers to welcome and care for them as we would care for Jesus himself. We continue to pray, mobilize, and advocate on behalf of our neighbors in poverty.

The church leaders who are part of the Circle of Protection work to ensure the vitality of church-sponsored programs serving people in or near poverty in the United States and around the world, while also supporting public sector efforts to alleviate poverty and increase opportunity for all of God's children.

We urge members of Congress to join us in maintaining a “circle of protection” around programs of assistance to people in poverty. We are bold enough to imagine news stories about Members of Congress from both parties joining together to support the urgent needs of low-income Americans and life-saving assistance to hungry and poor people around the world—because of the religious faith of those political leaders.

This fall, Congress is making decisions that have far reaching consequences for people living in poverty and working families struggling to make ends meet. We call on Congress to:

- 1. Protect funding for anti-poverty programs in appropriations and budget resolutions.**
 - a. Provide emergency assistance for those affected by natural disasters, giving priority to the needs of the low-income and vulnerable populations. Aid should not be funded by cutting ongoing programs that help low-income Americans around the country. We are especially concerned by the severity of the devastation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
 - b. Approve a bipartisan appropriations agreement that ends or eases sequester spending caps. Military spending should not be increased at the expense of programs that serve people struggling with poverty, those who ought to be given priority in budget choices.
 - c. Maintain assistance to low-income people at or above current levels in spending bills.
 - d. Help to maintain the growing economy and job market by avoiding brinkmanship in approving appropriations and increasing the debt ceiling.
 - e. Protect the health and well-being of millions of our fellow Americans—especially the weakest, the oldest, and children most at risk by not making deep cuts and harmful structural changes in Medicaid. We value decision-making that is close to the people, but we believe that turning Medicaid into a block grant or imposing per capita caps would reduce assistance to needy people over time. We ask our

leaders to consider options that do not require our poorest neighbors to bear most of the weight of budget and health care cuts.

- f. Continue investing in life-saving international assistance to the world's poorest people, both as an expression of our national values and in recognition of how this contributes to a more peaceful, prosperous, and secure world.

2. Protect and support low-income families in any tax legislation.

- a. We oppose cutting low-income programs to pay for tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy.
- b. Tax reform must be undertaken in such a way as to strengthen and empower low- and moderate-income families and small businesses.

Thank you for considering these requests, and for your service to our country. We commit to praying for you as you develop wise legislation for the nation and especially for our most vulnerable citizens and neighbors. We are ready to talk and pray with you.

Sincerely,

Members of Circle of Protection Steering Committee



Leith Anderson, President,
National Association of Evangelicals



John Ashmen, President,
Association of Gospel Rescue Missions



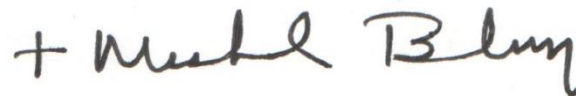
David Beckmann, President,
Bread for the World



Dr. Iva E. Carruthers, General Secretary,
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference



Rev. Noel Castellanos, President,
Christian Community Development Association



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



The Most Rev. Bishop Frank J. Dewane, Chairman,
Committee on Domestic Justice and Human
Development, United States Conference of Catholic
Bishops



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent
Emerita and Ambassador, The Wesleyan Church



Rev. Carlos L. Malavé, Executive Director,
Christian Churches Together in the USA



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



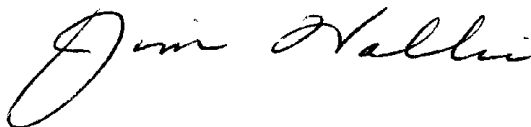
Ralph Middlecamp, President, National Council of
the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul



Diane Randall, Executive Secretary,
Friends Committee on National Legislation



Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President,
National Latino Evangelical Coalition



Jim Wallis, President and Founder,
Sojourners



Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Chair,
National African American Clergy Network



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