

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9)

Dear Senator/Representative:

July 25, 2019

As leaders representing a broad array of religious beliefs and faith traditions, **we write to urge you to pass a bipartisan budget agreement that lifts spending caps for non-defense programs and raises the debt ceiling before the August recess.** We come from a variety of faith perspectives, but our moral principles and scriptural teachings all affirm the need to enable all people to live with dignity and the opportunity to flourish. Federal nutrition assistance, housing assistance, reentry services, education and job training programs, international humanitarian and development assistance, and environmental protections are examples of the critical role federal funding plays in advancing these fundamental values. Houses of worship and religious organizations participate fully in delivering these services and could not be as effective if funds are reduced. **We call on Congress to immediately pass a bipartisan budget deal that lifts spending caps for non-defense spending and then prioritize funding for vulnerable populations and essential human needs programs in appropriations.**

The consequences of inaction on a budget deal are hauntingly severe for millions of people. If Congress fails to act, non-defense discretionary programs will see a \$55 billion cut for the coming fiscal year, not adjusting for inflation. Even freezing current non-defense spending levels would require a \$20 billion cut due to growing needs such as the 2020 Census, veterans’ health care, and inflation. The federal budget is a moral document, outlining our priorities as a country. While houses of worship and other faith-based nonprofits engage in acts of charity, we know we can’t do this work alone. Many of our outreach and service programs rely on federal funding including food pantries, after school programs, and utility and rental assistance.

Failure to pass a budget deal will impact Pentagon spending as well as non-defense spending. However, we believe there are ways to eliminate wasteful and unnecessary spending while increasing transparency and oversight over Pentagon spending.

Psalm 146:7 reminds us that God *“upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.”* We are called by the Lord to treat the poor with compassion and, *“not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them”* (Deuteronomy 15:7). We seek to reflect God’s love in all we do, as individuals, faith communities and together as a nation. People of faith across the country urge you to guide us toward a moral vision of a U.S. that is inclusive, accessible, affordable, accountable, and recognizes the human dignity in each of us. Funding these programs should be a priority to provide certainty and security for those in need, and to ensure the fiscal and physical well-being of our country. The faithful way forward is to enact a bipartisan budget deal that invests in these priorities by lifting the caps on non-defense spending and raising the debt ceiling.

Sincerely,

Sharif Aly, CEO, Islamic Relief USA

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World

David Bernstein, President and CEO, Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Rev. Jennifer Butler, CEO, Faith in Public Life

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Patrick Carolan, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network

Pavel DeJesús, Executive Director, Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ)

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

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

Sr. Patricia Flynn, RSM, Institute Leadership Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Sr. Judith Frikker, RSM, Institute Leadership Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Susan Gunn, Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

Rev. Nathan Hosler, Director, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, Church of the Brethren

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President, Union for Reform Judaism

Sheila Katz, CEO, National Council of Jewish Women

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston, Executive Director, Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

Brigid Lawlor, RGS, Provincial Advocacy Liaison, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Abby J. Leibman, President and CEO, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service

Sr. Patricia McDermott, RSM, President, Institute Leadership Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Sr. Anne Marie Miller, RSM, Institute Leadership Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Sr. Aine O'Connor, RSM, Institute Leadership Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Fr. Ted Penton, SJ, Secretary, Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

Rabbi Hara Person, Chief Executive, Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Rev. Ron Stief, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Rev. Louis Studer OMI, Provincial, USP Missionary Oblates

Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners

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

Scott Wright, Director, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Carol Zinn, SSJ, Executive Director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious