



## Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

### The Importance of the Social Safety Net January 2020

“[W]e are called to honour the poor and to give them precedence, out of the conviction that they are a true presence of Jesus in our midst. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ (Mt. 25:40).”

-Message of Pope Francis for the Second World Day of the Poor, June 13, 2018

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops strongly supports funding for poverty-reducing programs as well as policies designed to address climate change. Congress and the administration must put aside partisanship and work for bipartisan solutions to avoid severe and unnecessary cuts to programs that assist poor and vulnerable people, as well as support policies to combat climate change. Funding for these important programs both help people who continue to struggle to make ends meet and promote good stewardship of creation, truly serving the common good of all.

#### **Hunger and Nutrition**

It is important that Congress provide funding for the *Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations* that helps families and individuals impacted by hunger to access healthy and affordable food. Food insecurity is a problem that continues to affect close to 15 million Americans. Many families rely on important programs such as the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)*, and the *Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program*. These lifelines, and others, are essential to support those who suffer from hunger in its many forms.

#### **Labor, Health, and Human Services**

Adequate funding is needed for programs that care for the poor, the sick, and unemployed such as *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)*, a critical tool for states to target the areas of greatest need and provide funds to struggling families and assistance in finding employment; the *Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)* which provides necessary funds to states to provide social services in a way that meets the needs of persons and local communities; and programs that provide dislocated worker assistance, including the *Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)* program and other key programs that help people find meaningful employment which supports families and strengthens communities.

#### **Affordable Housing**

The country is in an affordable housing crisis. Housing costs are soaring. The supply of low-cost rental units is shrinking. Not enough assistance is available for individuals and families in need. Only one in four households who qualify, will receive assistance. People are struggling to make ends meet and are being denied their right to decent, safe, and affordable housing. Robustly funding affordable housing and community development programs

in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) budgets can help address the serious problem of housing affordability.

Effective programs exist, but they need adequate support to address the magnitude of the crisis. Programs like the *HOME Investment Partnership*, *Community Development Block Grants*, and *Rural Rental Housing* can provide resources to improve and grow the supply of low-cost housing. Tenant and Project-based *rental assistance* along with the *Public Housing Program* can provide a lifeline to low-income individuals and families, allowing them to pay their rent without sacrificing their other basic needs. Programs focused on housing for the elderly (*Section 202*), people with disabilities (*Section 811*), veterans (*HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing-VASH*), and people experiencing homelessness (*McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants*) help strategically direct resources to those who are particularly vulnerable. Funding for these programs must not only be maintained but increased. Program costs are rising due to private market rent inflation and construction costs while the great number of people in need demands that programs be expanded.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

National standards to reduce toxins and carbon pollution represent an important opportunity to protect the lives, health, and welfare of all people, especially children, the unborn, the elderly, poor and vulnerable communities. Recently, significant actions have been taken by Congress and the administration to roll back environmental policies and regulations, weakening the protection of our public lands and waters and increasing the risk of vulnerable people to the impacts of climate change. Given this reality, bipartisan funding for government agencies and programs that protect the environment is especially important. Congress should maintain, or if possible, increase funding for the *Environmental Protection Agency* and the *Department of Interior* to help care for God's creation and all people who depend on the environment for their livelihood, health, recreation, and survival.

### **USCCB POSITION:**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the preservation of funding for the social safety net, especially in areas of poverty alleviation, hunger and nutrition, affordable housing, and lifesaving policies to address climate change.

### **Congress should:**

- **Preserve funding for vital nutrition programs that alleviate hunger.**
- **Champion programs that care for the poor, the sick, and the unemployed.**
- **Take steps to safeguard and fund low-income housing options relied upon by millions.**
- **Provide essential funding for the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Interior.**

**RESOURCES:** Visit: <http://www.usccb.org/about/domestic-social-development/index.cfm>

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