



## United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000

WEBSITE: [WWW.USCCB.ORG](http://WWW.USCCB.ORG)

October 26, 2022

Dear Senator/Representative:

The post-*Roe* world presents uncertainties yet, amid them, an historic opportunity to redouble efforts toward a culture of life that respects and supports the dignity of every person at every stage. As you continue your work responding to current challenges and assess your priorities for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, we implore you to place a high priority on policies that advance the health, safety, and flourishing of women, children, and families.

In the first part of this letter, we share our vision for an authentically life-affirming society that prioritizes the well-being of families. Following this letter, we append specific policy recommendations to assist you in developing legislation to advance these goals.

### *A Call for “Radical Solidarity”*

The Supreme Court’s decision in the *Dobbs* case is an extraordinary step forward in our nation’s journey to respect the dignity of every person, regardless of age, race, immigration status, or any other factor. But that journey does not end with *Dobbs*. We are praying and working for changes in hearts and minds, circumstances and policy, that will help everyone to treasure each and every fellow human being in a society oriented to supporting children and their parents. In other words, we hope for the day when abortion is unthinkable because society has successfully reckoned with the challenges of raising children in the modern world and has decided to make the full flourishing of children and their families the highest goal, without anyone being excluded. To paraphrase St. John, our support for children and families should be more than “speech and words”: it should be expressed in “deed and truth,” in policy, organization, and action (1 John 3:18).

In “[Standing with Moms in Need](#),” we encourage a society in which the legal protection of human life is accompanied by profound care for mothers and their children. We continue to exhort our nation to prioritize the well-being of women, children, and families with both material resources and personal accompaniment so that no woman ever feels forced to choose between her future and the life of her child.

Ultimately, we call for what Saint John Paul II described as “radical solidarity” with mothers, babies (born and preborn) and families throughout each person’s entire lifespan. This is “a call to friendship and compassion rooted in the truth that we are made to love our neighbor as ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Promoting the Welfare of Women and Families*

There are serious cultural, social, economic, and spiritual challenges that face women, families, and children today. These are challenges that concern the common good. Ensuring that no children grow up in poverty, that parents have time away from work to care for them, that families are formed and remain intact, that the healthcare necessary for healthy moms and children is affordable, that workplace policies respect pregnant and nursing mothers, that child

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<sup>1</sup> *Building a Culture of Life in a Post-Roe World*, Statement by Archbishop William E. Lori, Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, October 2022, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/rlp-22-chairman-statement-FINAL.pdf>

care is affordable and high quality but also not forced on families by financial pressures, that no children are hungry or homeless, that toxic chemicals do not cause babies to have birth defects or cancer, that immigrant families be treated in accord with their inviolable dignity – all of these goals require the cooperation of all and the exclusion of none. Goals like these cannot be achieved by individual efforts alone and will necessarily require collaborative work on the part of our government leaders.

### *The Economy and the Family*

In attempting to address these challenges, we ask you to consider the Church’s bedrock principle that the economy must always be ordered to support the family. Wherever the economy undermines the family and children, it should be changed. We note the Second Vatican Council’s assertion that “The entire process of productive work... must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life, above all to his domestic life, especially in respect to mothers of families...”<sup>2</sup>

This, of course, is a goal that is not just for the government alone, but in partnership with all actors in the economy.

### *Work Life Supporting Healthy Families*

This worldview of prioritizing the support of the family is especially poignant as families are confronted with tensions between the demands of work and the costs of family life. As Pope John Paul II wrote, when considering the work of women in “nearly every sector of life”: “The true advancement of women requires that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role.”<sup>3</sup>

We would add that men’s advancement in the workplace also must not come at the cost of their indispensable role as fathers. Accordingly, we must ensure that public policy never replaces the role of families but, rather, empowers them,<sup>4</sup> and that, as we support families in need, we are mindful to not inadvertently perpetuate a state of need.

What would such a society and workplace really look like? Every sector of society would enjoy more stability and thrive if young people could more authentically value themselves and one another, form healthy, committed relationships, marry, and have children with confidence that their communities and society would really support them, no matter what obstacles they face.

### *Inclusion of Immigrant and Mixed-Status Families*

In speaking about the relationship between families and the economy, we must also recognize the central role of immigrant families within our society. In a country fundamentally shaped by the contributions of immigrants, both culturally and economically, we cannot accept policies that unjustly exclude newcomers, especially when we continue to rely on—and collectively benefit from—their labors. With a strong scriptural foundation,<sup>5</sup> the social doctrine of the Church clearly affirms that the “families of migrants have the right to the same protection

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<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 214 (citing *Familiaris Consortio*, 45).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Matthew 25:31–46, which was the basis for this recent reflection:

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Migration%20and%20the%20Judgement%20of%20the%20Nations.pdf>

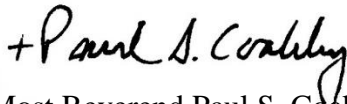
as that accorded other families,” including “the right to respect for their own culture and to receive support and assistance towards their integration into the community to which they contribute.”<sup>6</sup> Immigrant workers in particular, whether seasonal, undocumented, or otherwise, must be treated “not as mere tools of production but as persons.”<sup>7</sup>

*A Way Forward*

We are encouraged that members of both parties in the Senate and the House are putting forward new legislation on issues that directly impact mothers and children, and we are grateful for the time and effort going into these proposals. We implore you to work together to find bipartisan solutions and ensure that these and other similar legislative proposals are given high priority. We hope with a particular concern that we all can agree on coming to the aid of pregnant and single parenting women in need, so that they will have the support, comfort, and hope that they require to build their lives for the better and realize their aspirations.

Following this letter, please find a non-exhaustive list of policy recommendations that we urge you to consider in your deliberations. Bipartisan collaboration is essential to accomplishing any improvements. We stand ready to work with you to bring forward solutions in light of these aspirations and encourage long-term and ongoing dialogue on how the policies and laws of our country can be improved to support all children and families.

Sincerely,



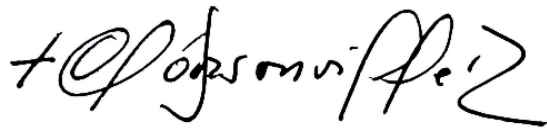
Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley  
Archbishop of Oklahoma City  
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice  
and Human Development



Most Reverend William E. Lori  
Archbishop of Baltimore  
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Most Reverend Salvatore J. Cordileone  
Archbishop of San Francisco  
Chairman, Committee on Laity, Marriage,  
Family Life and Youth



Most Reverend Mario E. Dorsonville  
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington  
Chairman, Committee on Migration

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<sup>6</sup> *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, art. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 66.



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## Policy Recommendations to Support Women and Families

*October 2022*

**Pregnant Workers Fairness Act:** Women in low-wage and physically demanding jobs are often denied pregnancy-related accommodations and are terminated from their employment or forced to take leave without pay. USCCB [supports](#) efforts to make the workplace more receptive to women and their preborn children by requiring employers to provide short-term, reasonable accommodations during pregnancy, such as being able to carry a bottle of water, a stool for jobs involving long periods of standing, or lighter duty for jobs entailing heavy lifting. No woman should be forced to risk her child's health, miscarriage, preterm birth, economic security, or losing insurance just because she requests a pregnancy-related accommodation.

**Child Tax Credit:** The USCCB supports the Child Tax Credit and has offered [principles](#) calling for its improvement. The credit currently excludes too many children in need. Congress can better support families by making the credit fully refundable, without a minimum income threshold, in order to have the biggest impact on the lowest-income families; continuing to make mixed-status families eligible for the credit; making the credit available for the year before birth; ensuring that the credit does not undermine the building of families; and not offsetting the costs of the credit by cutting programs that serve those most in need.

**PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act:** Due to gaps in the law, millions of mothers were left unprotected under the Break Time for Nursing Mothers Act passed in 2010. We [encourage](#) Congress to correct this unintended result by passing legislation requiring employers to extend to a broader group of working mothers simple accommodations - such as a reasonable break time and a place other than a bathroom - to express breastmilk at their places of employment.

**Pregnancy Resource Centers:** Pregnancy resource centers are community-based, non-profit providers that seek to meet the needs of pregnant women. These centers offer an array of assistance, such as providing critical health information on pregnancy, labor, and delivery, basic medical services such as ultrasound, material assistance such as clothing, diapers, formula, and even housing, assistance with child care, and parenting classes for mothers as well as fathers. Providing a tax credit for private donations to support these centers will strengthen their ability to serve the needs of women.

**Paid Family Leave:** The USCCB has supported and continues to support a federal paid family leave policy. At the same time, we encourage a funding mechanism that will not be unduly burdensome to lower-income organizations and individuals, will not penalize larger families, and will not destabilize existing social service programs.

**Child Care and Pre-Kindergarten Programs:** Increasing costs along with a shortage of accessible centers have made it increasingly difficult for working parents to find quality and affordable child care. Improving access to child care and pre-kindergarten options is another way to support working-parent families. This should be done in a way that avoids further entrenching the economic situation in which families that desire to have a parent provide care in the home are

unable to do so. Additionally, the faith-based sector has led in quality child care and early childhood programming for decades, and we urge that it be included in any early childhood or expanded pre-kindergarten program proposals.

**Marriage Penalties:** A stable and healthy marriage generally provides a powerful means of avoiding poverty and the best setting for children. Unfortunately, numerous tax provisions and social programs disadvantage married couples. As a result, some people are discouraged from marrying, which can contribute to more mothers being pregnant within the difficult context of an unstable relationship, or single and facing greater economic or care challenges. The USCCB supports rectifying marriage penalties, such as with Supplemental Security Income benefits, without leaving anyone worse off. Relatedly, supports for those in need should be designed or complemented to not inadvertently exacerbate our nation's fatherlessness crisis.

**Housing:** Access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is essential for the well-being of families. Housing policy should increase the supply of quality housing by encouraging and funding production, including through support for the National Housing Trust Fund and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC); preserve the affordable housing that does exist, including public housing; significantly expand rental assistance so it is available to all households in need; and encourage equal housing opportunities for all, including by opposing unjust housing discrimination and addressing racial disparities in homeownership.

**Maternal and Child Health:** The USCCB's [health care principles](#) state that policies must respect life and dignity, honor conscience rights, and ensure that care is accessible to all, truly affordable, comprehensive, and of high quality. We call for policies that address maternal mortality and morbidity in the United States and advance the well-being of mothers and their children. These include ensuring affordable and continuous health coverage such as by extending Medicaid postpartum coverage to 12 months, promoting best practices in maternal health care delivery, addressing racial disparities in health care, investing in community-based models of care to support pregnant and postpartum women and infants outside the delivery room, improving care and access to care in rural areas, supporting the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and adequately funding Medicaid for U.S. territories.

**Nutrition:** Congress should support and strengthen programs that feed hungry families like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Assistance Program (CSFP) and ensure these programs reach all those in need. These programs must be safeguarded from harmful cuts or changes that lessen their effectiveness or accessibility. Nutrition programs in U.S. territories should be moved to a permanent basis of parity with the states.

**Education:** We encourage the development of policies for secondary and higher education that will strengthen pregnant and parenting students' rights and opportunities to learn and build the life of their dreams, without fear that their child will put their future at risk.

**Healthy Relationships:** When people know their own great worth and that of others, rather than make each other part of what Pope Francis calls “throwaway culture,” they are less likely to face crisis pregnancies and more likely to be prepared to welcome children. The USCCB has supported the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program, the [Healthy Relationships Act](#), and measures preventing and responding to domestic violence, such as elements of the [Violence Against Women Act](#) and its recent incorporation of the Choose Respect Act. We encourage Congress to consider additional ways to cultivate respect, strengthen relationship and parenting skills, and protect the vulnerable.

**Adoption Support:** The USCCB supports laws and programs that encourage adoption and support adoptive families. The [Adoption Tax Credit Refundability Act of 2021](#) is one example of such a policy. The Act would make it less financially burdensome for low-income families to adopt by making the Adoption Tax Credit refundable. It is also critical that as many adoption agencies as possible be allowed to serve without fear of being discriminated against by the government for their beliefs in how they honor a child’s right to a mother and father (and for this reason we also support the [Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act](#)).

**Environmental Policies to Ensure the Health of Women and Children:** Environmental policy must include measures to ensure that harmful chemicals do not cause adverse health effects. Protecting the health of vulnerable populations like pregnant women and young children should be an obvious component of a broader strategy. One example of this would be the [PFAS Action Act](#), which would protect pregnant and nursing mothers and children from cancer, birth defects, and other maladies, as well as [methane regulations](#) which address the disproportionate impacts of pollution on the health of underprivileged populations, including many mothers and children.

**Inclusion of Immigrant and Mixed-Status Families:** Overlaying all of these recommendations is an expectation that each be applied to immigrant and mixed-status families in accordance with their God-given dignity. Attempts to limit the ability of immigrant and mixed-status families to avail themselves of programs and policies designed to uplift and strengthen families are generally incompatible with the common good and can constitute a grave moral injustice. This principle equally applies to those policies, intentionally or otherwise, that exclude noncitizen workers from the right to dignified working conditions, a just wage, and family unity. The USCCB will continue to support laws and programs that respect the lives and dignity of noncitizens, such as the bipartisan [Farm Workforce Modernization Act](#), and oppose those that undermine these objectives.