

September 29, 2020

Dear Senator/Representative,

As faith leaders representing a broad array of religious beliefs and faith traditions, we urge you to work together and pass a robust COVID relief bill before recessing for the elections. Our people and communities cannot wait until next year for action. As we approach the sobering loss of 200,000 lives in America with no end of the pandemic in sight, the vulnerable struggle under the weight of the health pandemic and crushing economic stagnation. As public servants elected to promote the common good, you must put aside destructive partisan gamesmanship and pass a robust COVID relief bill providing critical assistance to families and communities.

Our scriptures all affirm the need to prioritize vulnerable individuals, to enable all people to live with dignity and the opportunity to flourish. Psalm 140 reminds us that “the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.” (Psalm 140:12). Psalm 146 says that God “upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.” (Psalm 146:7). We should seek to reflect God’s love in all our actions as individuals, faith communities, and together as a nation.

Millions of people are unemployed, and the enhanced unemployment benefits expired weeks ago. Stimulus checks from the CARES Act are spent and gone. Eight million kids are in a home behind on rent, and 9 to 17 million kids are in food insecure households. The numbers are even more grave for Black, Latinx, and Native American children. More than 40 percent of Black children and more than a third of Latinx children live in a household that’s behind on rent or mortgage, didn’t get enough to eat, or both. With millions of children unable to access school meals, the Pandemic EBT Program has helped prevent additional child hunger, but that program will expire at the end of September. State, local, and tribal governments are facing enormous budget shortfalls, having laid off over 1.5 million people. These are teachers, firefighters, social workers, construction workers, and other essential workers. Without additional aid, state, local and tribal governments will have to institute more layoffs and cut vital services, such as Medicaid.

Around the world, the number of people facing a hunger crisis could double to 265 million according to the U.N World Food Program. Without substantial assistance from the U.S. and other developed countries decades of global progress in improving health outcomes, reducing poverty and lowering under-5 mortality around the world will be reversed. Extreme poverty will increase, food crises will multiply, more children will die from hunger-related causes and, in this context, the human rights of many vulnerable communities will be threatened. Children’s vaccination rates have already declined, and deaths from HIV, TB and malaria are projected to rise.

Finally, our fundamental democratic systems are in dire risk with the general election around the corner and a lagging Census decennial count due to COVID-19. Our state and local officials desperately need emergency funding to safely accommodate voter engagement and the Census Bureau needs the statutory extension for Non-Response Follow-Up operations through October, as was verbally agreed to by both chambers and the President last spring.

This situation is dire for our communities and for our nation. Our houses of worship and private charities are stepping up as best we can, but the people in our communities desperately need federal assistance. Failure to pass a robust COVID relief bill is not an option. We echo the call of the prophet Amos to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

We demand passage of a robust COVID relief bill that provides aid for those most in need.

Sincerely,

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