



DHN

INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

November 16, 2020

Dear [NAME]:

Traditionally, November is a month of remembrance, and on the 26th of this month, the day on which our nation celebrates Thanksgiving, families will gather around tables to embrace one another and pray in thanksgiving for what they have received. Unfortunately, because of COVID-19, not all families will be able to participate in this great American tradition. In a very real way these families will not have food to put on their tables, and the threat of hunger, unemployment, unpaid rent, mortgages, and medical bills will drown out the holiday joy this season is supposed to bring. During this month of remembrance, then, and on behalf of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs (DHN), a coalition representing an array of religious denominations, service agencies, and faith-based organizations, we ask Congress to take responsibility and support suffering families by passing a robust COVID-19 relief package.

As of November 16, 2020, there have been more than 10.6 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 243,000 deaths in the U.S. To put this into perspective, more Americans have died from the coronavirus than in the Vietnam War. The numbers are even worse for people of color. For instance, Black Americans are 2.6 times more likely to contract COVID-19, 4.7 times more likely to be hospitalized because of contracting the virus, and 2.1 times more likely to die from COVID-19–related health issues. Moreover, compared to white Americans, Latinos and Native Americans are dying at much higher rates relative to their share of the U.S. population (CDC 2020).

The economic numbers are equally devastating. Millions of people are unemployed, and the enhanced unemployment benefits that carried them through expired months 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. Again, the numbers are even more grave for Black and Latino children. More than 40 percent of Black children and more than a third of Latino children live in a household that is behind on rent or mortgage, did not get enough to eat, or both. Meanwhile, state and local governments are facing enormous budget shortfalls, and the essential services they provide are being cut. In short, COVID-19 has produced the perfect storm of suffering, and without a COVID-19 relief package, that storm will continue to grow.

To that end, as people of faith, we believe a robust COVID-19 relief package should enact the following policy priorities:

- Increase SNAP by 15%
- Allocate more money for housing, homeless assistance, and extend the moratorium on evictions
- Extend expanded unemployment assistance
- Expand the EITC and Child Tax Credit
- Authorize another economic impact payment

- Authorize pandemic TANF

Our faith traditions remind us that these are more than numbers; they are people, each bearing the inviolable dignity of God. Thus, for the reasons above, convicted by faith, we ask Congress to take responsibility and support suffering families by passing a robust COVID-19 relief package. As our scriptures affirm, God hears the cry of the poor. Now, we ask, does Congress?

Finally, we ask that Congress not let the great American tradition of Thanksgiving pass us by. Instead, we ask Congress to seize the season and let it touch our nation's heart, perhaps in a new and more meaningful way, knowing that with a COVID-19 relief package many more families will be able to gather around their tables and give thanks.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Blessings,