

January 18, 2018

Dear Senator/Representative:

As leaders representing a broad array of religious beliefs and faith traditions, we write to urge you to enact four urgent priorities that Congress must address before the continuing resolution expires on January 19, 2018. We come from a variety of faith perspectives, but our moral principles and scriptural teachings all affirm the need to prioritize vulnerable communities and struggling individuals, welcome the stranger, and enable all people to live with dignity and the opportunity to flourish. The consequences of inaction on major federal policy decisions are hauntingly severe for millions of people within this country. Thus, we call on Congress to immediately:

1. **Pass the Dream Act** to protect Dreamers from deportation, providing a pathway to citizenship without increased immigration enforcement;
2. **Fully fund and reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI), and other health extenders;**
3. **Fund desperately needed disaster and emergency relief** for Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida, Texas, and California; and
4. **Pass a budget deal that protects critical non-defense programs** from sequestration. We believe sensible cuts can be found in the Pentagon budget, but **at the very least, ensure any increase in defense spending is matched dollar for dollar with non-defense increases.**

- 1) **Pass the Dream Act to protect Dreamers from deportation without increased, harsh immigration enforcement.** The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has allowed Dreamers to thrive and contribute to society without fear of deportation. The cancellation of DACA leaves around 700,000 young immigrants facing imminent threat of deportation again. Without congressional action, millions of Dreamers will continue to be caught in limbo and forced to make impossible choices between their family, community, stability, livelihoods, and legality. Tens of thousands of immigrant youth have already lost their work permits and protections from deportation. We consider this to be a matter of moral urgency. Congress must enact a pathway to citizenship that allows for Dreamers to stay here with their families and communities without the fear of additional unjust enforcement measures. Leaving DACA recipients and other Dreamers in limbo violates our nation's values and sends a message of exclusion to immigrant youth, some of whom do not have family or a support system in their birth country that many don't even remember. The Dream Act is the only bipartisan, bicameral solution and the best option for Dreamers and our nation. The window for action is closing; Congress must act immediately to protect Dreamers.
- 2) **Fully fund and reauthorize CHIP, SDPI and other health extenders.** We believe that the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI), and other health extenders, such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), and Community Health Centers are part of our sacred obligation to care for one another. For two decades, these programs have helped improve the lives of millions in need. CHIP has provided quality coverage to millions of pregnant women and children in working families whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to purchase private health insurance. Without CHIP, many of these families would be unable to afford health insurance for their children. Community Health Centers have filled a critical need among underserved, rural, and immigrant communities, who might not otherwise have access to

primary care services. American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have the highest prevalence of diabetes amongst all U.S. racial and ethnic groups. SDPI has reduced the high prevalence, seeing as much as a 54% decline in End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) due to diabetes between 1996 and 2013. By cutting the need for ESRD in half among Native Americans and Alaska Natives, SDPI has created significant cost savings. Unfortunately, CMS has recently reported that after January 19 they will not be able to guarantee that all states will receive funding for CHIP. SDPI also faces serious uncertainty around funding unless Congress acts. Both CHIP and SDPI have enjoyed strong, bipartisan support. Congress last extended CHIP with overwhelming support across the aisle as part of the Medicaid and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015, and in September 2016 a bipartisan group of 75 Senators and 356 House Members wrote to Congressional leaders to encourage the swift renewal of SDPI. We urge you to continue this tradition and not let politics interfere with the lives of millions of children, hardworking families, and Native communities. A failure to renew these programs would be irresponsible and immoral.

- 3) **Fund desperately needed disaster and emergency relief for Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida, Texas, and California.** As a result of the hurricanes that recently struck the southern U.S., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, devastation remains widespread. Half of Puerto Rico still does not have electricity, thousands of homes remain destroyed or damaged, and public health needs still have not been met. Hundreds of billions of dollars are still needed for all places that have been afflicted by these disasters, but Congress needs to quickly provide more than its initial efforts. In addition to this, the Trump Administration has failed to adequately address these needs. Budgets are designed to exempt emergency funding from being paid for in order to ensure a swift and adequate response. Because of this, we believe that any attempt to try and pay for emergency relief through cuts to other programs is especially immoral. Just as we have helped other communities recover from prior hurricanes, we should be doing the same for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- 4) **Pass a budget deal that protects critical non-defense programs from sequestration and ensure any increase in defense spending is matched dollar for dollar with non-defense spending.** We believe sensible cuts can be found in the area of Pentagon spending, but at the very least, it is essential that any increase in defense spending be matched dollar for dollar with an equal increase in non-defense spending, directed first to those programs serving individuals and families struggling to make ends meet. Programs serving essential services are at risk of harmful cuts if Congress fails to protect non-defense spending from sequestration cuts. Many of these programs enable struggling individuals to put food on the table and hard-working parents to provide a better future for their kids. Nutrition assistance for low-income seniors, children, and new moms; low-income housing assistance; workforce development and training programs; reentry services; environmental protection; and international humanitarian assistance are just a few of examples of the many programs that could face cuts without sequester relief, robbing our communities at home and abroad of vital resources and potential.

People of faith across the country urge you to continue guiding 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 must be a priority in order 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 comprehensive, bipartisan package that encompasses solutions to these issues and provides assistance for those in need.

Sincerely,

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