



November 27, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

As national religious organizations, denominations, and faith traditions, we know that budget and tax decisions are moral decisions. These choices show who we preference as a nation and who pays the price. They show our values, who and what we care about as a nation. All of our faiths teach us that the center of our concern should be those at the economic margins of our society. Therefore, we, the interfaith community, are speaking with one voice.

We must oppose the Senate version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act because the bill violates our faith values as well as the fundamental issues of tax fairness, fiscal discipline, and prioritizing those most in need.

First, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is fiscally irresponsible. It grows the deficit by \$1.5 trillion dollars over ten years. Growing deficits and debt threatens not only the fiscal health of our country, but it also threatens future funding for the programs that help countless families put food on the table and provide for their children. This additional \$1.5 trillion in lost revenues will lead directly to future cuts in critical anti-poverty programs and low-income services including Medicaid, SNAP, low-income housing assistance, and other critical services for families struggling to make ends meet. The tax system should be structured to support investments in programs that create economic opportunity and dignity for all, especially families struggling to make ends meet. This bill violates the moral responsibility to care for the vulnerable.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act makes the tax code more regressive by giving tax breaks to the wealthiest households and large corporations, paid in part by tax increases on low- and moderate-income individuals. Provisions such as dramatically cutting the estate tax for the wealthiest 0.2% of households, lower rates for pass-through income, and repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax will give enormous benefit to the wealthiest. For people struggling to make ends meet, the latest Joint Committee on Taxation report projects that households earning between \$10,000 and \$30,000 would face sharp tax increases after 2021, while most Americans earning less than \$75,000 per year would face higher taxes by 2027. This proposal is the exact opposite of a moral mandate to focus on those who struggle the most.

At the same time, low-income families are left out of the benefits of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The bill increases the Child Tax Credit, but the increase is skewed toward wealthier families and leaves behind millions of working families. 10 million children whose parents work low-paying jobs would get a token increase of \$75, while wealthier families receive an extra \$1000. We have grave concerns about the cuts

to the Child Tax Credit and the American Opportunity Tax Credit for immigrant families. Yet again this bill fails a basic moral test by excluding those on the margins.

Finally, the bill includes a troubling repeal of the individual health insurance mandate with no replacement. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 13 million more Americans will be uninsured by 2027, and those who rely on the nongroup market will face an additional 10% increase on their premiums as a result of this policy. This would take us further from our shared, moral vision of a health care system that offers health, wholeness, and human dignity for all. Repealing the individual mandate with no replacement will harm those experiencing vulnerability and sickness, and it is unacceptable to cause 13 million more Americans to go without the security of health coverage so that the wealthiest can enjoy deeper tax cuts.

Rather than cutting these key anti-poverty investments for working families, a morally faithful way forward would have Congress

1. Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit so that no worker is taxed into poverty,
2. Expanding the Child Tax Credit for low income workers so that those who need the credit most benefit
3. Expanding the American Opportunity Credit so that students can more easily afford higher education which is critical for success.

These are faithfully moral choices that Congress can make.

We call on Congress to put the needs of working families and struggling communities first in creating a just tax system. All our faith traditions call us to prioritize struggling families and vulnerable communities in our laws and policies. We respectfully ask you to ensure that any tax changes taken as part of our tax debate be based on principles of fairness and shared commitment to the common good.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

American Friends Service Committee

Bread for the World

Board of Church and Society, Tennessee Conference United Methodist Church

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids

Ecumenical Poverty Initiative

The Episcopal Church

Faith Action Network – Washington State

Faith in Public Life

Faith that Heals Ministries, Tennessee Conference United Methodist Church

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Interfaith Worker Justice

Islamic Relief USA

Jesuit Conference, Office of Justice and Ecology

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

National Council of Jewish Women

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

The Poligon Education Fund

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Institute Justice Team

Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA.

Union of Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

United Church of Christ, Justice & Witness Ministries

The United Methodist Church- General Board of Church and Society