

September 26, 2023

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Members of Congress,

As 53 faith organizations, representing people of faith across religious traditions and denominations, we agree that the moral vision of our faith communities includes a federal government that ensures the social well-being of every person, especially the most vulnerable members of society. With the U.S. facing the real threat of a government shutdown, that responsibility is being put to the test. Historically, previous shutdowns have been brief. While any length of shutdown has negative consequences, the impact of a shutdown on our society's most vulnerable members is especially severe. We are called to practice compassion and mutual care for our fellow human beings as core tenets of our sacred teachings. With this in mind, **we urge Members of Congress to fund the government and to work in a bipartisan manner to pass a Continuing Resolution without harmful provisions.**

Congress must prioritize human needs in the annual FY24 appropriations bills and reject cuts to essential programs such as: the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); nutrition assistance for schools; early childhood programs; access to affordable housing; and, other programs that support thriving children, families, and communities. As Congress considers annual spending bills, we also urge you to invest in critical infrastructure to welcome newcomers, to reject unrestricted funding for border security and enforcement, and to oppose restrictions to humanitarian protection.

The aftermath of a government shutdown will begin within days of the federal government running out of money and the ensuing financial hardship will only compound the difficulty families already face making ends meet. The burden of those harms will fall most heavily on the nation's most vulnerable communities—families living at or near poverty, individuals with disabilities, low-wage workers employed by the government and its contractors, and anyone needing immediate government assistance. Earlier this year, in the context of negotiations around the nation's debt ceiling, Congress passed the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, which put limits on spending on critical human needs programs in the call for greater austerity. That agreement set the framework for FY24 funding and represents the minimum of what is necessary to invest in our people and to protect our planet. For example, the proposed decrease in funding to WIC will impact about half a million people. This funding will not be sufficient to support the projected increase of participants amid rising food costs.

The critical need to invest in communities was made clear this week as the U.S. Census Bureau released data on poverty, income, and health insurance coverage for 2022. The number of people with incomes below the poverty line in 2022 rose a sobering **15.3 million**, reflecting

disinvestment following the expiration of pandemic relief programs. The **poverty rate for children more than doubled** from a historic low of 5.2 percent in 2021 to 12.4 percent in 2022, erasing all of the record gains made against child poverty over the previous two years. Progress made in 2021 in narrowing the glaring differences between the poverty rates of Black and Brown children relative to their peers was halted. The exponential rise in the poverty rate, the largest on record in over 50 years both overall and for children, underscores the critical role that policy choices play in the level of poverty and hardship in the country.

Our laws and values support hope for individuals fleeing political and religious persecution, conflict, and targeted violence by explicitly providing for the legal and human right to seek asylum. For many asylum seekers, presenting at the U.S. southern border is their only chance of refuge. We encourage you to invest in migrant humanitarian assistance programs for localities and NGOs meeting their needs. We equally look to our elected leaders to invest in refugee protection and resettlement; refugees strengthen our communities and federal funding is critical for a resilient, agile, sustainable, and efficient resettlement program. These types of investments would bolster the work of states, cities, and other institutions, like places of worship, who are needed in creating sustainable community-based responses to forced migration in partnership with federal agencies. Reacting to the news that the U.S.-Mexico border has now become the world's deadliest land route and amid reports of prevalent negligence and other abuses in detention facilities, we urge you to ensure that tax dollars do not go towards further harm and abuse, and to reject attachments, like H.R. 2.

Including H.R. 2 would be misguided and detrimental. H.R. 2 would strip away protections for unaccompanied children; detain children and their families; increase the vulnerability of migrants; and, prevent faith groups from fulfilling their witness and religious calling to welcome the sojourner. Unrestricted funding for CBP and ICE's meanwhile, would widen these agencies' latitude to further militarize the borderlands, increase punitive enforcement, and restrict the right to seek asylum. The U.S. must reassert global leadership in humanitarian protection, not deny it.

As our beloved communities face growing threats from climate change through rising temperatures, wildfires, smoke hazards and rising sea levels, we must do all we can to secure strong funding levels for climate action and environmental justice. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided historic levels of investment towards a clean energy future. In order for the full benefits to reach our communities, we need strong government funding to implement the IRA's climate and public health programs to protect all people and our Sacred Earth. Congress must oppose measures to rescind or cap IRA funds.

Congress has an outsized role in reversing the country's increased poverty. September is a pivotal time as Congress must pass a Continuing Resolution in a few short days to fund the continued operation of the federal government. This is an opportunity for policymakers to work in a bipartisan manner to provide funding to meet the pressing needs of their constituents.

Congress must keep its most fundamental promise to the nation's people: to enact a fair and just budget that allows the nation, including its most vulnerable families and those seeking safe haven here, to have a sufficient, dignified life—and to urgently prevent a damaging shutdown as it works to fulfill that promise.

1. Alliance of Baptists
2. American Friends Service Committee
3. Church World Service
4. Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
5. Creation Justice Ministries
6. Daughters of Wisdom - US Delegation
7. Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids
8. Dominican Sisters of Hope
9. Dominican Sisters of Peace
10. Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa Peace and Justice Office
11. Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
12. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
13. Franciscan Action Network
14. Franciscan Peace Center, Clinton, Iowa
15. Friends Committee on National Legislation
16. Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart
17. Holy Cross Sisters
18. Interfaith Power & Light
19. Islamic Relief USA
20. Ladysmith Servite Sisters
21. Leadership Conference of Women Religious
22. Leadership Team of the Felician Sisters of North America
23. Leadership Team of the Sisters of St Francis Neumann
24. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
25. MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
26. Medical Mission Sisters, Unit North America, Justice Office

27. Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
28. National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
29. National Council of Churches
30. National Council of Jewish Women
31. National Religious Campaign Against Torture
32. NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
33. Presbyterian Church USA Office of Public Witness
34. School Sisters of Notre Dame, CP JPIC/Shalom Office
35. Sisters of Benet Hill Monastery
36. Sisters of Bon Secours, USA
37. Sisters of Charity of New York
38. Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
39. Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary of the Woods, IN
40. Sisters of Saint Anne, United States
41. Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
42. Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia
43. Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, LA
44. Sisters of the Holy Cross
45. Sisters of the Humility of Mary
46. Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary
47. Sojourners-SojoAction
48. T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
49. The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
50. Union for Reform Judaism
51. Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
52. United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries
53. Us/Haiti Province of the Religious of Jesus and Mary