



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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October 20, 2011

The Honorable Daniel K Inouye, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Norman D. Dicks, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Inouye, Chairman Rogers,
Ranking Member Cochran, and Ranking Member Dicks:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to address the moral and human dimensions of the Fiscal Year 2012 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Despite the desperate and increased need for secure, affordable housing, the Conference Committee is dealing with legislation that includes substantial cuts to programs that serve poor and vulnerable people and communities. These proposed cuts will fall particularly on the people and communities least equipped to absorb them.

In *The Right to a Decent Home*, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote:

Since decent housing is a human right, its provision involves a public responsibility. The magnitude of our housing crisis requires a massive commitment of resources and energy. Government must supplement and regulate the activities of private individuals and institutions in order to achieve our housing goals. A creative partnership of private enterprise and government is necessary.

Government has an obligation to ensure this basic need of citizens when other institutions and the market cannot.

Clearly, Congress, the Administration, and government at all levels face challenges to get our financial house in order. In light of growing deficits, Congress faces difficult choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. However, Congress should not choose disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons as the way to address these challenges.

As pastors and teachers, we offer several moral criteria to help guide difficult budgetary decisions:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects “the least of these” (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

The Bishops’ Conference is particularly concerned that severe cuts to programs serving vulnerable populations and communities will leave many people with no decent options. These cuts would cause thousands of individuals and families to lose their housing and worsen the hardship of thousands more in need of affordable housing. At a time when the need for assistance from HUD programs is growing, the House and Senate bills would help even fewer people than those currently being assisted.

Programs such as Housing for the Elderly (Section 202), Housing for People with Disabilities (Section 811), Housing for People with AIDS (HOPWA), Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH), McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance, and Tenant- and Project-based Rental Assistance are vital to ensuring that vulnerable Americans have safe and affordable housing. The Catholic Bishops urge you to provide enough funding so that these programs can serve all people who currently lack safe, affordable housing.

Additionally, nonprofit housing counseling agencies approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have been vital to fighting the foreclosure crisis. Research has demonstrated that the personalized attention provided by counselors is an effective foreclosure prevention tool. Housing counseling programs need to be funded and expanded to serve more families at risk of foreclosure.

I encourage you to support and adequately fund programs that provide decent and affordable housing for poor and vulnerable people and their families.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Susan M. Collins
The Honorable Tom Latham
The Honorable John W. Olver