



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG • FAX 202-541-3339

August 31, 2017

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
Dear Senator:

As Congress proceeds with the 2018 budget process, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reaffirms that the federal budget is a moral document with profound implications for the common good of our nation and world. The budget requires difficult decisions that ought to be guided by moral criteria that protect human life and dignity, give central importance to "the least of these" (Matthew 25), and promote the welfare of workers and families who struggle to live in dignity.

The Catholic Church teaches that it is the role of the state to promote the three pillars of the common good. In May 2017, we outlined these three pillars: respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person, promotion of human development, and defense of peace. Our Conference has long supported the goal of reducing future unsustainable deficits that would harm all citizens, especially those who are poor. However, a just framework for sound fiscal policy cannot rely almost exclusively on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons.

Sharp increases in defense and immigration enforcement spending, coupled with simultaneous and severe reductions to non-defense discretionary spending, particularly to many domestic and international programs that assist the most vulnerable, are profoundly troubling. The House Budget Committee's H.Con. Res. 71 proposes increasing defense spending by \$929 billion over the next decade, which is \$72 billion above sequester levels. This is coupled with a proposal to cut \$4.4 trillion over the same period from domestic and international programs that assist the most vulnerable, potentially impacting health care safety net programs like Medicaid, Medicare, and CHIP, as well as food security programs like SNAP. The proposal would also reduce current funding levels for environmental stewardship by \$824 million.

Such deep cuts would harm people facing dire circumstances, and would place the environment and natural resources at risk. When the impact of other potential legislative proposals, including the proposed reduction of spending on health care by hundreds of billions of dollars over the next decade and implementation of tax policies that would offer trillions of dollars in tax cuts to the wealthy over the same period are considered, the prospects for vulnerable people become even bleaker.

Our nation should elevate diplomacy, along with humanitarian and international development assistance, as primary tools for promoting lasting peace, regional stability and human rights. The USCCB urges Congress to reject H. Con. Res. 71's proposed fiscal year 2018 budget authority level of \$41.521 billion for the International Affairs functions of government. This would represent a \$10 billion cut from this year's appropriations for those functions. Although the USCCB does not support every individual International Affairs account, it has repeatedly called for robust diplomatic efforts to end longstanding conflicts in a range of countries, including Syria and Iraq, as well as for robust funding for refugee and humanitarian assistance. It is hard to reconcile the need for diplomacy, political solutions, and life-saving humanitarian and development assistance with cuts to the State Department budget of the magnitude proposed by H. Con. Res. 71.

At the same time, H. Con. Res. 71 anticipates dramatic increases in immigration enforcement spending. We fear that such increases could pave the way for enactment of many of the destructive proposals contained in recently released budget plans, including increases in immigrant detention beds, the construction of a wall along the entire

border between the United States and Mexico, and the expansion of agreements with state and local governments that threaten local law enforcement's ability to foster trusting relationships with immigrants in their jurisdictions. Any changes to the tax code called for through reconciliation should include a provision to empower the educational choices of families. The reconciliation process should not be used to achieve savings through cutting health care, nutrition, income security, or other anti-poverty programs. This budget attempts to use the reconciliation process to fast-track over \$200 billion in cuts to anti-poverty programs over the next ten years, including Medicaid and Medicare. The bishops have devoted their efforts to addressing the morally problematic features of health care reform while insuring that all people have access to health care coverage.

The human consequences of budget choices are clear to us as pastors. Our Catholic community defends the unborn and the undocumented, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. We help mothers facing challenging situations of pregnancy, poor families rising above crushing poverty, refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, and communities devastated by wars, natural disasters and famines. In much of this work, we are partners with government. Our combined resources allow us to reach further and help more. Our institutions are present in every state and throughout the world, serving some of the most marginalized communities and enjoying the trust of local populations.

The moral measure of the federal budget is how well it promotes the common good of all, especially the most vulnerable whose voices are too often missing in these debates. The Catholic Bishops of the United States stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a federal budget that reduces future deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, and advances peace and the common good.

Sincerely yours,

- + Tim. Card. Dolan

His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

+ Frank J. Dewane

Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development

+ Oscar Cantú

Most Rev. Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and
Peace

+ George V. Murry, SJ

Most Rev. George V. Murry, SJ
Bishop of Youngstown
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+ Christopher J. Coyne

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Bishop of Burlington
Chairman, Committee on Communications

+ Joe S. Vásquez

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United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

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