



*Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development*  
*Committee on International Justice and Peace*

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November 12, 2013

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Committee on the Budget  
624 Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Chair  
House Committee on the Budget  
207 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Sessions  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on the Budget  
624 Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on the Budget  
B-71 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murray, Chairman Ryan,  
Ranking Member Sessions, and Ranking Member Van Hollen:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to thank you for the recent agreement to end the partial government shutdown and restart suspended programs and services. As you work on a larger budget package that sets the country on a sustainable fiscal path, we continue to urge wise bipartisan leadership and moral clarity in crafting a plan that responsibly replaces sequestration and protects programs serving poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad. A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in these essential programs.

As you know, a second conference committee is currently negotiating an agreement to the farm bill. We have serious concerns about using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or other programs that serve poor and hungry people, to find savings in the budget. We urge you to reject proposals that would use such potential savings to relieve a percentage of the sequestration cuts. Savings that pay for other domestic spending priorities should not come at the expense of vulnerable people in need.

A balanced, bipartisan, and just agreement will require shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly. We again offer moral criteria to help guide these 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” (Mt 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 Budget Control Act (BCA) exempted many important antipoverty programs from sequestration, and we supported and commended Congress for that decision. However, many discretionary programs that provide vital services to people and families living in poverty, both here and throughout the world, have been cut deeply in recent years. Continuing sequestration threatens even deeper cuts.

Our nation has a proud history of saving lives by providing international assistance in times of disaster and helping people overseas to work their way out of poverty. However, our international assistance ranks near the bottom of donor countries as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). Donor countries give on average 0.45 percent of GDP; the U.S. only 0.2 percent. We can do better. Most Americans assume we give much more.

We urge you to address sequestration in order to protect poverty-focused international humanitarian and development assistance. Last year the Office of Management and Budget estimated that fiscal year 2013 sequestration cuts alone could deprive 3.33 million people of life-saving food assistance and 276,500 of HIV/AIDS treatment, leading to about 63,000 more deaths and 124,000 more orphans. Since FY 2010 international assistance has been cut by almost 20 percent, and further cuts to these essential programs would erode our ability to reduce poverty and build a more prosperous, peaceful and secure world.

Domestically, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently reported that “worst case [housing] needs continue to grow at record rates.” In making this claim, HUD was using data that predates sequestration. As many as 125,000 families have potentially lost housing assistance already as a result of sequestration, and thousands more have been affected through cuts to programs serving the elderly, people with disabilities, people with AIDS, and those experiencing homelessness. Young children would also suffer. Sequestration has already claimed 57,000 slots from Head Start programs, and imminent cuts will only lead to more children losing out on early education.

According to the Department of Labor, the average length of unemployment remains over nine months, and there are still about three job seekers for every available opening. In light of this prolonged economic pain, extending emergency unemployment benefits for those out of work the longest is the just and decent thing to do.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* unambiguously states it is the proper role of government to “make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on” (no. 1908). In many instances, the government is a partner with the Church and its ministries in accomplishing this work. Relieving sequestration in a balanced manner will allow the Church to continue its important work and reach more people in need.

Congress and the Administration face serious and consequential budgetary decisions regarding appropriations for fiscal year 2014. The Catholic bishops of the United States welcome future opportunities to discuss these issues and stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a budget that reduces future unsustainable deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire  
Bishop of Stockton  
Chairman, Committee on Domestic  
Justice and Human Development

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines  
Chairman, Committee on  
International Justice and Peace

Cc: Members of the Budget Conference Committee