



A Circle of Protection:

A Statement on Why We Need to Protect Programs for the Poor

In the face of historic deficits, the nation faces unavoidable choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. These choices are economic, political—and moral.

As Christians, we believe the moral measure of the debate is how the most poor and vulnerable people fare. We look at every budget proposal from the bottom up—how it treats those Jesus called “the least of these” (Matthew 25:45). They do not have powerful lobbies, but they have the most compelling claim on our consciences and common resources. The Christian community has an obligation to help them be heard, to join with others to insist that programs that serve the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world are protected. We know from our experience serving hungry and homeless people that these programs meet basic human needs and protect the lives and dignity of the most vulnerable. We believe that God is calling us to pray, fast, give alms and to speak out for justice.

As Christian leaders, we are committed to fiscal responsibility and shared sacrifice. We are also committed to resist budget cuts that undermine the lives, dignity, and rights of poor and vulnerable people. Therefore, we join with others to form a Circle of Protection around programs that meet the essential needs of hungry and poor people at home and abroad.

1. The nation needs to substantially reduce future deficits, but not at the expense of hungry and poor people.
2. Funding focused on reducing poverty should not be cut. It should be made as effective as possible, but not cut.
3. We urge our leaders to protect and improve poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance to promote a better, safer world.
4. National leaders must review and consider tax revenues, military spending, and entitlements in the search for ways to share sacrifice and cut deficits.
5. A fundamental task is to create jobs and spur economic growth. Decent jobs at decent wages are the best path out of poverty, and restoring growth is a powerful way to reduce deficits.
6. The budget debate has a central moral dimension. Christians are asking how we protect “the least of these.” “What would Jesus cut?” “How do we share sacrifice?”
7. As believers, we turn to God with prayer and fasting, to ask for guidance as our nation makes decisions about our priorities as a people.
8. God continues to shower our nation and the world with blessings. As Christians, we are rooted in the love of God in Jesus Christ. Our task is to share these blessings with love and justice and with a special priority for those who are poor.

Budgets are moral documents, and how we reduce future deficits are historic and defining moral choices. As Christian leaders, we urge Congress and the administration to give moral priority to programs that protect the life and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in these difficult times, our broken economy, and our wounded world. It is the vocation and obligation of the church to speak and act on behalf of those Jesus called “the least of these.” This is our calling, and we will strive to be faithful in carrying out this mission.



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Programs Focused on Providing Assistance to Hungry People

The following is a summary of federal programs focused on assisting hungry and poor people. It is provided for informational purposes and should not be read as an unqualified endorsement of any particular program in its current form by any organization or individual.

DOMESTIC:

Food Assistance

- SNAP (formerly food stamps)
- Free and reduced-price school meals

Low-Income Child Care and Early Education

- Head Start

Low-Income Health Care

- Medicaid
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

Tax Credits and Income Support

- Refundable tax credits (EITC; the refundable component of the Child Tax Credit)

Low-Income Education and Training

Shelter and Homelessness

Preventing Child Maltreatment

Refugee Assistance

INTERNATIONAL:

International Food Assistance and Emergency Response

- P.L. 480 Title II Food for Peace
- McGovern-Dole International Food for Education

Global Health

- Global Health and Child Survival—State Department (includes PEPFAR)
- Child Survival and Maternal Health

Sustainable International Development Programs

- Development Assistance

International Refugee Assistance and Post-Conflict Support

Peacekeeping

Sustainable International Development Programs

International Poverty-Focused Financial Services (in ways that serve the poorest of the poor)