



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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February 14, 2011

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), we call on Congress to place the needs of the poor, the unemployed, the hungry, and other vulnerable people first, in setting priorities in the Fiscal Year 2011 Continuing Appropriations Resolution. Decisions on how to allocate opportunities and burdens in setting budget priorities are more than economic policies -- they are significant moral choices. Meeting essential human needs is a compelling ethical and fiscal priority. The health, stability and well being of our nation depend on these decisions. A moral measure of the budget is how it treats “the least of these” at all stages of life from conception until natural death.

Current proposals call for drastic reductions in non-security related programs that serve the poor and vulnerable. In a time of economic crisis, the poor and vulnerable are in greater need of assistance, not less. Preserving the national security of the country is without doubt imperative, but we cannot secure the nation while at the same time furthering the insecurity of the poor and vulnerable in our midst.

We support reasonable solutions and strategies to address the federal deficit that will ensure stability and security for future generations. However, we advocate for a balanced approach that is just and works to preserve the well-being of poor and vulnerable people. Congress should adopt a spending plan for the remainder of FY 2011 that ensures adequate funding for programs that offer opportunity and help to the poor, children, seniors, and people with disabilities and other vulnerable persons. Congress should help to alleviate the burden of the vulnerable, not make it worse.

The need to protect life is clear in decisions on whether to use public funds to attack innocent human life-- and in this regard we welcome the bill’s **retention of all appropriations riders against abortion funding**, and its **restoration of a consistent ban on such funding in the District of Columbia**.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference offers examples of possible considerations that reflect some of our concerns with the proposed plan:

- The USCCB calls on Congress to work to ensure adequate **health care** coverage to those in need. The proposed **\$1 billion** cut to **Community Health Centers** will deny health care to nearly ten million poor and vulnerable people including mothers and children at risk. These centers are often the only access to health care for tens of millions of people in our country.
- The bishops affirm their long-standing position that safe, affordable and decent housing is a human right. At a time of record foreclosures, increasing homelessness and rising housing costs, the proposed cut of **\$2.3 billion** to **affordable housing programs** is not justifiable in light of the housing crisis for low and moderate income families.
- Reducing **job training programs** by a proposed **\$1.75 billion** does not make sense at a time of high unemployment and low job creation. Further, this will prolong the economic pain of the very people seeking adequate training to re-enter the job market. Many of those most affected by job loss are less-skilled workers who need additional training and skill development to re-enter the

workforce. Congress must ensure funding for and support efforts to strengthen and improve these quality training programs with successful outcomes.

- We are deeply concerned by **cuts in FY 2011 refugee funding** that the bill would make. More specifically, the bill would cut available funding in FY 2011 for domestic refugee resettlement programs operated by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) by \$77 million, or 10.5 percent relative to FY 2010 appropriations. And it would cut funding for refugee admissions and overseas refugee assistance programs in the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account that is operated by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) by \$827 million, or 44.8 percent, relative to FY 2010 appropriations. USCCB believes that cuts to these accounts, which have been historically under-funded, would have a devastating effect on refugees, Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa recipients, victims of torture and trafficking, unaccompanied alien children, and other vulnerable populations served by PRM, ORR, and the communities across the country that welcome these populations.
- As you consider the FY 2011 Continuing Appropriations Bill, we urge you, at a minimum, to maintain the funding for the MRA and ORR accounts at the FY 2010 total enacted level. To do otherwise would have a devastating impact on those displaced persons around the world who are almost entirely dependent on the international system for life-saving assistance, as well as to those who we have offered the life-saving assistance of admission to the United States.

The spending choices of Congress have clear moral and human dimensions; they reflect our values as a people. We are not policy makers, but pastors and teachers. But, we remind Congress that the poor and vulnerable have a priority claim on our limited, although still substantive, financial resources. In efforts to pass a responsible spending resolution for the remainder of FY 2011, decisions should be made that not only reflect a commitment to national and long term fiscal security but demonstrate justice, compassion and fairness. Our plea, then, is simple: Put the poor and vulnerable first as you consider how to spend limited federal resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen E. Blaire".

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