



**Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of Domestic Social Development**

**The Importance of the Social Safety Net
February 2019**

“[W]e are called to honour the poor and to give them precedence, out of the conviction that they are a true presence of Jesus in our midst. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ (Mt. 25:40).”

-Message of Pope Francis for the Second World Day of the Poor, June 13, 2018

BACKGROUND:

As of this writing, the Federal Government is in its longest shutdown in decades. Disagreement in Congress and with the administration over funding for the border wall and how to finalize the remaining spending bills leaves many important federal programs without funding and many federal workers without pay. Additionally, in the coming months it is expected that for fiscal year 2020, budget caps are expected to compel the new Congress to seek significant cuts of approximately \$36 billion to non-defense discretionary spending. There will be pressure to reduce funding for programs that serve the “least of these” at home and around the world impacting nutrition and affordable housing programs, among others. The U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops strongly supports funding for domestic and international assistance for poverty-reducing programs as well as policies designed to address climate change. Congress and the administration must put aside partisanship and work for bipartisan solutions to avoid severe and unnecessary cuts to domestic and international programs that assist poor and vulnerable people, as well as support policies to combat climate change. Funding for these important programs both help people who continue to struggle to make ends meet and promote good stewardship of creation, truly serving the common good of all.

Hunger and Nutrition

It is important that Congress provide funding for the *Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations* which helps families and individuals impacted by hunger to access healthy and affordable food. Food insecurity is a problem that continues to affect close to 15 million Americans. Many families rely on important programs such as *The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)*, and *The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program*. These lifelines, and others, are essential to support those who suffer from hunger in its many forms.

Affordable Housing

The country is in an affordable housing crisis. Housing costs are soaring. The supply of low-cost rental units is shrinking. Not enough assistance is available for individuals and families in need. Only one in four households who qualify, will receive assistance. People are struggling to make ends meet and are being denied their right to decent, safe, and affordable housing. Robustly funding affordable housing and community development programs in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) budgets can help address the serious problem of housing affordability.

Effective programs exist, but they need adequate support to address the magnitude of the crisis. Programs like the **HOME Investment Partnership, Community Development Block Grants, and Rural Rental Housing** can provide resources to improve and grow the supply of low-cost housing. Tenant and Project-based **rental assistance** along with the **Public Housing Program** can provide a lifeline to low-income individuals and families, allowing them to pay their rent without sacrificing their other basic needs. Programs focused on housing for the elderly (**Section 202**), people with disabilities (**Section 811**), veterans (**HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing-VASH**), and people experiencing homelessness (**McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants**) help strategically direct resources to those who are particularly vulnerable. Funding for these programs must not only be maintained but increased. Program costs are rising due to private market rent inflation and construction costs while the great number of people in need demands that programs be expanded.

Environmental Stewardship

National standards to reduce toxins and carbon pollution represent an important opportunity to protect the lives, health, and welfare of all people, especially children, the unborn, the elderly, poor and vulnerable communities. Recently, significant actions have been taken by Congress and the administration to roll back environmental policies and regulations, weakening the protection of our public lands and waters and increasing the risk of vulnerable people to the impacts of climate change.

Congress has upheld, often in bipartisan manner, funding for government agencies and programs that protect the environment. Last year, however, appropriations were not provided for agencies that protect the environment such as **the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of the Interior (DOI)**. Additionally, *bi-partisan climate legislation* was recently introduced that places a price on carbon, H.R. 763, The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019. A fee levied on carbon is a reasonable step to help reduce emissions with revenues redistributed to all taxpayers, minimizing the economic impact on the poor, families and their communities.

USCCB POSITION:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the preservation of funding for the social safety net, especially in areas of poverty alleviation, hunger and nutrition, affordable housing, and lifesaving policies to address climate change.

Congress should:

- **Preserve funding for vital nutrition programs that alleviate hunger.**
- **Take steps to safeguard and fund low-income housing options relied upon by millions.**
- **Provide essential funding for the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Interior Appropriations. Pass H.R. 763, The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019, bi-partisan climate legislation that puts a price on carbon emissions while minimizing the impact on communities and families.**

RESOURCES: Visit: <http://www.usccb.org/about/domestic-social-development/index.cfm>

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