

March 24, 2020

Dear Member of Congress:

Protect civil society, faith institutions, and families

The COVID-19 pandemic is straining every institution in American society and likely has already pushed our economy into a recession. To date, many of the policy responses to the pandemic have centered on business and on government, excluding the crucial role of civil society. A thorough response, however, would sustain the nation's hundreds of thousands of community organizations, religious congregations, and nonprofit providers that are a crucial source of our nation's resilience and strength. Facing a unique public health crisis, the social safety net—services delivered by government and by its nonprofit partners—needs to be both adapted and fortified. **Emergency legislation should also strengthen civil society, including faith-based charities, houses of worship, and families--sources of care for the vulnerable and agents of social solidarity in an era of required social distancing.**

As representatives of faith-based institutions, we encourage emergency legislation to include the following provisions.

- **Incentivize charitable giving and also directly invest in the nonprofit sector.** Congress should enact a robust universal charitable deduction that gives a deduction on taxes to all charitable givers, allowing a credit against 2019 taxes for contributions made before the extended filing deadline. A stimulus package should include at least \$60 billion for the nonprofit sector and not only aid to business sectors and individuals. Some of the support should be made available to religious nonprofits that serve low-income communities, because of their vital role in reaching underserved populations.
- **Empower faith-based organizations to contribute to the social safety net while preserving their religious freedom** by enabling funds to flow to faith-based organizations without restrictions that limit their religious freedom. Aid should be declared not to be “direct federal financial assistance” - a designation that can carry unnecessary limitations on faith-based recipients. Often, religious congregations are on the front lines providing childcare, feeding, and after school programs. These vital services should be eligible for support.
- **Protect religious nonprofit workers and those employed by houses of worship along with other vital work and family protections.** Many non-profits, including many churches, do not participate in their state unemployment

insurance programs. A COVID-19-related decline in tithes, donations, tuition payments, and other sources of revenue could trigger lay-offs of religious nonprofit workers. The extension and adaptation of Disaster Unemployment Assistance to this crisis would enable states to cover workers who are laid off as a result of this pandemic, including those affiliated with congregations. Additionally, we recommend that funding be allocated to strengthen states' unemployment insurance administrations for this crisis. The recently enacted Families First Coronavirus Response Act should be expanded to cover large employers and to extend paid leave to those caring for elderly or disabled family members. Tax refunds associated with mandated leave payments must be available proactively and provided quickly in order to prevent cash flow crises for nonprofit and faith-based employers.

The coronavirus presents many novel challenges. Responsive public policy should be as inclusive as possible, while continuing to respect and uphold the diversity of responders that are needed to sustain our society. Emergency spending measures should aim to strengthen families, the nonprofit sector, including congregations and faith-based charities, and not only businesses; faith-based schools as well as public schools; small organizations as well as larger, professionalized entities.

Stephanie Summers, CEO, Center for Public Justice

Stanley Carlson-Thies, Senior Director, Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance

Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Galen Carey, VP of Government Relations, National Association of Evangelicals

Shirley V. Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Wendell Vinson, Pastor, Canyon Hills Church; Co-Founder, CityServe

David Donaldson, Co-Founder and Chairman, CityServe

John Ashmen, President, Citygate Network

Chad Hayward, Executive Director, Accord Network

Carol Bremer-Bennett, U.S. Director, World Renew

Peter Zigterman, Director of Immigrant Family Services, World Relief Chicago

Apostle Angeloyd Fenrick, LICSW, Founding Director, Columbia Learning International

Pastor Ronald and Coletta Jones, Sr. Pastors, Rock Christian Ministries, Washington, DC

Pastor Andrew and Dr. Betty Newell, Senior Pastors, New Covenant Evangelistic Center

Rev. Dr. Irwyn L. Ince, Jr., Exec. Dir., Grace DC Institute for Cross-Cultural Mission

Pastor Cheryl Mitchell Gaines, J.D., M.Div., Senior Pastor, ReGeneration House of Praise, "The Church in the Field"

Michelle C. Kirtley, PhD, Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors, Samaritan Health Center

Anna Hollis, Executive Director, Amachi Pittsburgh

Vilma "Nina" Balmaceda, President & CEO, Peace and Hope International

Pastor Kevin and Darlene Hart, Senior Pastors, The Christian Tabernacle Church, DC

Pastor Harold Dugger, First Baptist Church of Capitol Heights

Pastor Daniel and Yolanda Cook, Senior Pastors, Life Changing Ministries. MD

Dr. Mary E. Proctor, Senior Pastor, Wells of Water Holy Evangelistic Ministries, MD

Rev. Rosemary Wright, Senior Pastor, Jesus Saves Christian Center, MD

Apostle Diane Crawford, Family Life Worship Center International, Washington, DC;
National Phlebotomy Association, Inc. CEO/Founder Landover, Maryland

Dr. Alethia Simmons, Founder Seven Keys to A Mother's Heart Ministry, MD

Pastor Bobby and Gail Perkins, Senior Pastors, World Mission Ministries

Raynard H. Hillis, Sr., Pastor, Double Rock Baptist Church, San Francisco, CA

Bishop E.L. Jackson, Senior Pastor, Grace Tabernacle Community Church, CA

Ronald A. Matthews, President, Eastern University

Steve Blom, Executive Director, Bright Promise Fund

Rev. David B Carver, The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights

Rev. Michael Jarrett, Priest in Charge, Trinity on the Border, Harlingen, TX

Emily Poff, Executive Director, Kankakee County Chamber of Commerce (IL)

Anne Snyder, Editor-in-Chief, Comment

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Rev. Dr. Randall Bush, Senior Pastor, East Liberty Presbyterian Church

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