



**Catholic Social
Ministry Gathering**
**Reunión del Ministerio
Social Católico**

“Blessed are the Peacemakers” (Mt 5:9) ***A Catholic Message to Congress***

In a country and a world filled with conflict and division, it is the bold and courageous who: work for peace, call for a cessation to the cycle of violence, pause to reflect on our common humanity, and consistently treat the “other” with respect so as to tackle the problems that affect us all. In his 2023 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis exhorts: *“The time has come ... to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to a good that is truly common.”*

We represent hundreds of Catholics from around the country who have gathered in person in Washington, DC for the 2023 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering. We are here to affirm the need to strive for peace and justice, to promote healing and reconciliation, to defend all human life and dignity, and to work for the common good in our society and in the world.

As we begin 2023 and lawmakers embark on the 118th Congress, we ask that you consider the following priorities:

Support children and families by passing a strengthened Child Tax Credit

The Child Tax Credit is a powerful pro-family and anti-poverty tool, but it must be strengthened so its full effects can benefit those children most in need. The credit should be expanded so it is fully refundable, prioritizes the poorest children, and continues to include mixed-status families. We urge members of Congress to engage in dialogue and work together to improve the Child Tax Credit to promote our shared goals of strengthening families and ensuring that no children grow up in poverty.

Support hungry and vulnerable people with robust international humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding assistance

Increase funding for international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian programs in Fiscal Year 2024 to address global hunger and conflict (see chart of accounts supported by USCCB and CRS). More than 48.9 million people are currently on the brink of starvation while the number of people living in poverty has increased for the first time in 20 years. Armed conflict, as well as political and economic crises, in places such as Ukraine, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Nicaragua, are also disrupting progress, driving more than 89 million people from their homes, more than ever before. This assistance, which must maintain provisions protecting life, will reduce hunger and poverty, address the root causes of conflict, and advance peace and security.

Pass legislation providing our new Afghan neighbors with a pathway to permanent legal status

During the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, thousands of Afghan nationals, many of whom risked their lives to serve alongside U.S. servicemembers, were relocated to the United States. Most entered the country with humanitarian parole, which only authorizes them to remain in the United States for up to two years, and expires in August 2023 for the majority of this population. They need a legal pathway to real and lasting safety. We ask Congress to pass legislation, such as the Afghan Adjustment Act (S. 4787/H.R. 8685), a bipartisan bill introduced during the previous Congress, to allow these resettled Afghans—who would otherwise have faced a dire future under Taliban rule—to apply to become lawful permanent residents.



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*The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
and
Catholic Relief Services*

***Cordially Invite
Members of Congress and Staff to a Congressional Reception***

to mark the conclusion of the 2023 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering Advocacy Day

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

in the Rayburn Office Building, Room 2044

3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Co-sponsored by Representatives Christopher Smith and Henry Cuellar

Light refreshments and hors d'oeuvres will be provided. This is a widely attended event



Department of Migration and Refugee Services Office of Policy and Advocacy

Permanent Protections for Our Afghan Neighbors

January 2023

“Indeed, history teaches us that the contribution of migrants and refugees has been fundamental to the social and economic growth of our societies. This continues to be true in our own day. Their work, their youth, their enthusiasm and their willingness to sacrifice enrich the communities that receive them. Yet this contribution could be all the greater were it optimized and supported by carefully developed programs and initiatives. Enormous potential exists, ready to be harnessed, if only it is given a chance.”

– Pope Francis, *Message for the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (2022)

BACKGROUND:

Since August 2021, over 75,000 Afghan nationals have been resettled in the United States, following the U.S. military’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. government dubbed this “Operation Allies Welcome.” For twenty years, American forces and international partners depended on the vital services of Afghans who aided with interpretation, translation, transportation, and more. With the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, these allies and their families became subject to increased danger. There have been numerous reports of Afghans who were supportive of the U.S. mission being killed or targeted because of the assistance they provided to our country.

In 2009, Congress created the bipartisan, humanitarian Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program for Afghan nationals who assisted the efforts of the U.S. government. The program offers approved applicants and their families admission to the United States, resettlement services, and legal permanent residence. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reported that at the time of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, over 36,000 of the Afghans evacuated were SIV applicants who had been waiting for their applications to be processed, and over 4,000 had already been referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for resettlement. The remaining Afghan nationals who did not fall into these categories were family members of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents, family members of SIV holders, SIV applicants and refugee referrals, SIV-eligible persons, and those deemed eligible for USRAP. The vast majority of those evacuated were granted humanitarian parole for a two-year period. However, parole is not an immigration status and most Afghans present in the United States on parole have no direct access to a permanent status, leaving them with the complex and backlogged asylum system as their only way forward. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles involved in the asylum process. That puts tens of thousands of men, women, and children in danger of becoming unlawfully present in the United States once their parole expires later this year, not to mention the loss of work authorization and other benefits.

By establishing a more streamlined process for Afghan parolees to apply for lawful permanent residence, the Afghan Adjustment Act would alleviate the ongoing fear and uncertainty faced by this population, giving them permanent protections and the ability to integrate fully within American communities.

USCCB POSITION:

Our Afghan brothers and sisters, like all persons created in God's image, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Therefore, government policies that respect and promote that dignity are necessary. Not providing the certainty of full legal integration for our new Afghan neighbors is contrary to this principle.

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has spoken extensively on the issue of migration and the Catholic Church's commitment to an "ever wider 'we.'" Praying for those fleeing the dangerous situation in Afghanistan, the Holy Father stated: "In these troubled times that see Afghans seeking refuge, I pray for the most vulnerable among them. I pray that many countries will welcome and protect those seeking a new life...may all Afghans, whether at home, in transit, or in host countries, live with dignity, in peace and fraternity with their neighbors." In his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father highlights "the plea of the stranger" and the scriptural call "to recognize Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters."

For these reasons, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops supports legislation granting a direct pathway to permanent legal status for Afghan parolees present in the United States.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Urge Congress to pass legislation providing Afghan humanitarian parolees in the United States with a pathway to permanent legal status, such as the bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act (S. 4787/H.R. 8685), which was introduced during the previous Congress.

RESOURCES:

- Backgrounder: [Our New Afghan Neighbors](#)
- Statement: [U.S. Bishops' Migration Chairman Calls for Swift Passage of Afghan Adjustment Act](#)
- Letter: [USCCB Letter of Support for Afghan Adjustment Act](#)

CONTACTS:

- David Spicer, Department of Migration and Refugee Services, dspicer@uscbb.org
- Celina Márquez, Department of Migration and Refugee Services, cmarquez@uscbb.org



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on International Poverty-Reducing Humanitarian and Development Assistance - January 2023

“...to live better lives after the Covid-19 emergency, we cannot ignore one fundamental fact, namely that the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected... Consequently, we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars... We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labor for all...” - [Pope Francis, World Day of Peace, 2023](#)

BACKGROUND:

U.S. sponsored international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has provided opportunities for countless millions around the world to move out of poverty. Of the more than \$4 trillion U.S. federal budget, Congress allocates half of 1% towards poverty-reducing international assistance with strong bipartisan support. This small fraction of the federal budget supports the poorest and most vulnerable communities around the world through agricultural assistance to help farmers feed their families; medicines to ensure people living with HIV remain healthy; cost-effective vaccines to prevent diseases; and mosquito nets to avert malaria. Moreover, these funds assist orphans and vulnerable children; early childhood development; people facing the risk of famine; populations devastated by conflicts; communities at risk of increasing floods, droughts, and other climate change impacts; and peacekeepers to protect innocent civilians.

While U.S. sponsored international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has saved millions, incredible challenges remain, especially related to global hunger and conflict. The United Nations World Food Program estimates that 48.9 million people are currently on the brink of starvation while the number of people living in poverty has increased for the first time in 20 years. Extreme hunger has more than doubled since 2019, with surging food, fertilizer, and energy prices further constraining household purchasing power and agricultural productivity more recently. Climate change has proven a threat multiplier--disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable--by destroying agriculture and natural resources, disrupting livelihoods, contributing to mass displacement, and increasing the risk of conflict. Conflict, as well as political and economic crises are also disrupting progress, driving more than 89 million people from their homes, more than ever before.

USCCB and CRS POSITION:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. USCCB and CRS support international assistance because it is effective in upholding the sacredness and dignity of all human life and nurturing peaceful and just societies. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us all that, “What we need in fact are states and civil institutions that are present and active, that look beyond the free and efficient working of certain economic, political or ideological systems, and are primarily concerned with individuals and the common good.” The Church views international assistance as an essential tool for promoting human life and dignity, reducing poverty, advancing global solidarity, and

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enhancing peace and security throughout the world. International assistance is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these” (Matthew 25). Therefore, assistance must be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in short-term self-interest, or self-promotion.

CRS operates in over 110 countries and is a key implementing partner of the U.S. government. Among numerous programs around the world, CRS provides food assistance to conflict affected people in South Sudan and Ethiopia; supports education in Guatemala; delivers emergency assistance to families impacted by the war in Ukraine; helps children with HIV thrive in Cameroon; and provides support to drought affected families in Afghanistan.

USCCB and CRS’ experience affirms the idea that the U.S. can play a constructive role in advancing peace, justice, and wellbeing. The numerous global challenges we face today demand a strong U.S. response. U.S. leadership will be critical to end global hunger; prepare for future health crises; care for our common home and address climate change; mitigate human suffering and address the root causes of conflict and instability; and strengthen local capacity to bring about transformational change.

We commit to working with Congress to uphold human dignity, to stand in solidarity with the poor, to be good stewards of the earth, and to prioritize the common good. We have grave concerns about providing taxpayer funding for activities inconsistent with the Catholic faith and basic human rights. Therefore, we strongly urge Congress to maintain the Helms Amendment and other long-standing policies that protect human life in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. The USCCB will oppose any bill that expands taxpayer funding of abortion, including any appropriations bill.

STATE OF PLAY:

In December, Congress passed Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations, almost three months after the start of the fiscal year. While Congress provided small increases to many of the core accounts that USCCB and CRS support and included supplemental humanitarian assistance for people impacted by the war in Ukraine and other emergencies, delayed appropriations do impact the effective delivery of critical humanitarian and development assistance.

At the beginning of February 2023, we expect the President to submit his Fiscal Year 2024 budget request to Congress. This submission will kickstart a months long process of conversation and debate on Capitol Hill about spending for the upcoming fiscal year, which starts October 1, 2023. This means that our timing on Capitol Hill is ideal to share our perspective on the Church’s international funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2024. Moreover, given the difficulty of moving legislation through a divided Congress, it is more important than ever that we speak with a moral voice to all members of Congress about the importance of international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance and U.S. leadership.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Urge your member of Congress to support increases to international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian assistance in Fiscal Year 2024 to address global hunger and conflict (See chart of accounts supported by USCCB and CRS).

RESOURCES:

Visit: www.usccb.org/IJP. Contact: *Steve Hilbert*, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace, shilbert@usccb.org, 202-541-3149.

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International Poverty-Reducing Development and Humanitarian Accounts

January 13, 2023



Appropriations Accounts (\$ in thousands)	FY21 Base Approps	FY22 Base Approps	FY23 Base Approps	Preliminary [†] USCCB/CRS FY24 Request
<i>State, Foreign Operations (SFOPs)</i>	22,942,035	23,300,906	24,270,435	28,653,687
Maternal and Child Health (including GAVI)	855,000***	890,000	910,000	1,012,000
Nutrition	150,000	155,000	160,000	230,000
Vulnerable Children (orphans and displaced children)	25,000	27,500	30,000	35,000
Malaria	770,000	775,000	795,000	900,000
Tuberculosis	319,000	371,050	394,500	469,000
Neglected Tropical Diseases	102,500	107,500	114,500	114,500
Global Health Security	190,000	700,000	900,000	900,000
HIV/AIDS (State PEPFAR and USAID)	4,700,000	4,720,000	4,725,000	4,725,000
Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis	1,560,000	1,560,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
Development Assistance (including Water, Basic Ed)	3,500,000	4,140,494	4,368,613	4,769,787
International Disaster Assistance	4,395,362	3,905,460**	3,905,460*	4,700,000
Migration and Refugee Assistance	3,432,000***	2,912,188**	2,912,188*	3,912,000
Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance	100	100**	100	100,000
Complex Crises Fund	30,000	60,000	60,000	60,000
Millennium Challenge Account	912,000	912,000	930,000	930,000
Atrocities Prevention Fund (ESF & INCLE)	5,000	5,000	6,000	25,000
Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities	1,456,314	1,498,614	1,481,915	1,590,000
Peacekeeping Operations	440,759	455,000	460,759	455,000
Green Climate Fund (Treasury)	0	0	0	1,600,000
Anti-Trafficking in Persons (DA, ESF, AEECA, INCLE)	99,000	106,000	116,400	126,400
<i>Agricultural (Ag)</i>	1,970,000	1,977,000	1,993,331	2,265,000
Title II Food for Peace	1,740,000***	1,740,000**	1,750,000*	2,000,000
McGovern-Dole	230,000	237,000	243,331*	265,000
<i>Labor, Health and Human Services (LHHS)</i>	96,125	106,000	116,125	128,965
Bureau of International Labor Affairs (DOL/ILAB)	96,125	106,000	116,125	128,965
COMBINED TOTAL	25,008,160	25,383,906	26,379,891	31,047,652

†The figures in this column are tentative and remain subject to change prior to submission of final USCCB/CRS funding requests in the coming weeks. *Total enacted with supplemental funding for Ukraine/globe: IDA-\$4.837B; MRA-\$4.447B; FFP-\$1.8B; FFE-\$248M. **Total enacted with supp funding for Afghanistan/Ukraine: IDA-\$11.3B; MRA-\$5.1B; ERMA-\$2.28B; FFP-\$1.84B. *** Total enacted with supp funding for COVID-19: MCH/GAVI-\$4.86B, MRA-\$4.03B; FFP-\$2.54B.

Summary of Message to Congress and Account Descriptions

The Church views international assistance as an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with low and middle-income nations, and enhance human security. The USCCB and CRS prioritize the accounts below because they are most focused on saving lives and reducing poverty. This assistance is just over one-half percent of the federal budget. We urge Congress to **fund international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian programs to alleviate suffering and invest in peace.**

Maternal and Child Health programs provide low-cost, life-saving interventions such as micronutrient supplementation, nutritional support, newborn care, immunization, and treatment of pneumonia and diarrheal disease – addressing the biggest killers of mothers and children in the developing world. This account also provides funding for the U.S. contribution to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, which purchases vaccines for children in poor countries. Programs such as these have helped reduce the number of preventable child deaths worldwide from 12.6 million in 1990 to 5.3 million today.

Nutrition programs provide interventions such as micronutrient supplementation and growth monitoring, which combined with an adequate diet and clean water and sanitation, improves outcomes during the first critical years of a child's life. Malnutrition is the underlying cause of 45 percent of preventable child deaths.

Vulnerable Children funding promotes family care for vulnerable children and seeks to reduce violence against children.

HIV and AIDS PEPFAR (USAID & State Funding) supports HIV and AIDS efforts in 50 countries to achieve epidemic control. Ten percent of PEPFAR funding focuses on mitigating the negative impact of HIV on orphans and vulnerable children affected and infected by HIV and AIDS. Also included is funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria which works to prevent, treat, and care for people with HIV, TB and Malaria and build health systems. The Global Fund is working in over 100 countries and has saved 32 million lives. Although we have principled concerns about those PEPFAR prevention activities we find inconsistent with Catholic teaching and do not implement or advocate for these activities, we support PEPFAR's overall lifesaving mission and urge robust funding for the Global Fund.

Malaria programs treat, prevent, and control this deadly disease which is one of the biggest killers of children under five worldwide.

Tuberculosis programs screen, diagnose, and treat millions of people each year. TB is the leading infectious killer globally.

Neglected Tropical Diseases programs focus on scaling up integrated treatment to prevent parasitic and bacterial diseases that cause morbidity and mortality.

Global Health Security programs prevent, prepare for, and respond to unanticipated and emerging global health threats.

Development Assistance programs support an array of critical development activities, including basic education; Global Food Security Act implementation; clean water and sanitation; microfinance, climate change adaptation and mitigation, democracy promotion and good governance, and conflict management and mitigation.

International Disaster Assistance funds emergency health, water, shelter and nutrition efforts, as well as disaster risk reduction and rehabilitation through the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). It also supports cash and voucher-based Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP). *Due to budgetary constraints in FY22 and FY23, Congress reduced the base funding number and included what is ostensibly base appropriations in a supplemental title in the Omnibus bill.*

Migration and Refugee Assistance protects refugees and internally displaced persons, helps them to repatriate when conflict ends or natural disaster responses permit, and supports admissions to safe countries like the U.S. *Due to budgetary constraints in FY22 and FY23, Congress reduced the base funding number and included what is ostensibly base appropriations in a supplemental title in the Omnibus bill.*

Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance is a drawdown account used, with Presidential authority, to respond to humanitarian crises. ERMA is capped at \$100M.

Complex Crisis Fund enables rapid investments to catalyze peace and mitigate conflict in the face of unforeseen crises or violence.

Millennium Challenge Account provides U.S. funding to countries with a commitment to good governance, focusing on infrastructure projects.

Atrocities Prevention Fund provides resources to the Department of State for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities, including by acting on the recommendations of the Atrocity Early Warning Task Force.

Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities deploy peacekeeping troops to protect civilians in places like Sudan and Somalia. Based on UN assessed rates of contribution, the U.S. is currently in arrears estimated at more than \$1.28 billion.

Peacekeeping Operations finances the training and equipping of peacekeeping troops and the professionalization of militia groups committed to protecting their people. The U.S. is currently in arrears estimated at \$108 million.

Green Climate Fund provides assistance to developing countries to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. In addition to the Green Climate Fund, other multilateral and bilateral programs to address climate change adaptation and mitigation should be considered.

Anti-Trafficking in Persons assistance helps other nations to prevent trafficking, prosecute perpetrators, and support victims.

Title II Food for Peace provides U.S. food aid for emergencies and funds \$350 million in long-term development programs that support nutrition and build resilience.

McGovern-Dole provides school lunches and take-home food rations to encourage students, especially girls, to attend school, and other school support efforts. No less than \$26.5 million should provide for local and regionally procured commodities for sustainability.

Bureau of International Labor Affairs funds programs to combat the worst forms of child labor, forced labor, and trafficking in persons.



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

Background on the Child Tax Credit January 2023

“Family-friendly social, economic and cultural policies need to be promoted in all countries. These include, for example, policies that make it possible to harmonize family and work; tax policies that acknowledge family burdens and support the educational functions of families by adopting appropriate instruments of fiscal equity; policies that welcome life; and social, psychological and health services that focus on supporting couple and parental relationships.”

- Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2022

The Church presents a vision, shared by many Americans, of a society that is authentically life-affirming and oriented to supporting children and their parents. The Child Tax Credit is a prime example of such a policy. Every year, the credit lifts millions of families out of poverty, helping them live in dignity and with greater economic security. The credit could be made even stronger to reach more children that are currently excluded from its full benefits. A proven tool that could lift millions more children out of poverty, the Child Tax Credit should be used to its full potential.

BACKGROUND:

The current Child Tax Credit of \$2,000 per child under the age of 17 is not structured to help the children who need it the most. The poorest children are not eligible to receive the full value of the credit because their families’ earnings are too low. The credit is only available to families that earn at least \$2,500 and a portion of the credit is not refundable, meaning it is only available to families with tax liability, leaving behind families whose incomes are so low that they owe little or no federal income tax. This structure cuts off nearly 19 million low-income children from the full benefit of the Child Tax Credit.¹

For the year 2021 only, the American Rescue Plan Act expanded the Child Tax Credit. Congress made the credit fully refundable and removed the \$2,500 earnings phase-in so that all low- and middle-income families received the full benefit. They also increased the credit’s amount, made it available through monthly payments, and included seventeen-year-old children. Many families used the expanded credit to meet basic needs such as food, utility bills, rent or mortgage payments, clothing, and education costs.² The expansion was extremely effective at reducing child poverty, lowering it by 2.1 million children.³ In fact, 2021 saw the lowest child poverty rates on record, driven in large part by the Child Tax Credit expansion. Unfortunately, when the expanded credit expired at the end of the year, millions of families abruptly lost their financial stability, leading to a spike in child poverty.⁴

¹ Greenstein, Robert, “Next Steps on the Child Tax Credit.” The Hamilton Project, November 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/next-steps-on-the-child-tax-credit/>.

² “Most Common Uses of 2021 Child Tax Credit Payments: Food, Utilities, Housing, Clothes.” Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, 22 March 2022, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/updates/show/294-child-tax-credit-payments>.

³ Burns, Kalee, et al. “Expansions to Child Tax Credit Contributed to 46% Decline in Child Poverty Since 2020.” U.S. Census Bureau, 13 September 2022, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html>.

⁴ Parolin, Zachary, et al. “Absence of Monthly Child Tax Credit Leads to 3.7 Million More Children in poverty in January 2022.” Columbia Center on Poverty and Social Policy, 17 February 2022, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/monthly-poverty-january-2022>.

Despite compelling data and calls from advocates to renew the 2021 expanded credit or otherwise improve the Child Tax Credit, Congress has not yet enacted legislation to do so. However, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have acknowledged the importance of the Child Tax Credit and have expressed interest in working towards an improved credit, an encouraging sign as we enter a new Congress.

USCCB POSITION:

The USCCB has consistently advocated for a continuation of the expanded Child Tax Credit, emphasizing the need for the full credit to be available to the lowest-income families.

The USCCB has long supported the Child Tax Credit while calling for its improvement so the most vulnerable children can benefit from the full credit. As the U.S. bishops stated in their pastoral document, *Putting Children And Families First*, “those with the greatest need require the greatest response. This is the ‘option for the poor’ in action. While every family needs support, poor families and families facing discrimination carry the greatest burdens and require the most help. With limited resources, we need to focus assistance on those with the greatest needs.”

We ask Congress to support children and families by passing a strengthened Child Tax Credit. This can be done by:

- structuring the credit so that it is fully refundable, without a minimum income threshold, in order to have the biggest impact on the lowest-income families,
- continuing to include eligibility for mixed-status families in the credit,
- making the credit available for the year before birth,
- ensuring the credit does not undermine the building of families, and
- not cutting programs that serve those most in need in order to offset costs of the credit.

The Child Tax Credit should be strengthened because the lowest income families and the most vulnerable children are being left out. The priority must be for those children to have access to the full credit, to target the benefit to the children who need it the most. Making the credit fully refundable, so that the entire credit is available to the poorest families, is the most effective step we can take to help the credit reduce child poverty.⁵ Allowing the credit to be claimed for the year before birth would be another important improvement to help the credit reach the most vulnerable mothers, easing a burden during a period of increased financial stress and uncertainty. Meanwhile, aspects of the credit that do serve those most in need should be protected by maintaining eligibility for all families with U.S. citizen children regardless of their parents' immigration status, continuing to support and strengthen families by not financially disincentivizing marriage and being available to all children no matter the family size, and working alongside other essential programs to serve those on the margins. The Child Tax Credit has great potential to bring together all those working to support the well-being of families and children.

RESOURCES:

Visit: For additional background on USCCB advocacy on the Child Tax Credit, see:
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/letters-congress-child-tax-credit-may-19-2022>

For additional background on USCCB advocacy on family policy, see:
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-regarding-policies-support-women-and-families-october-26-2022>

Contact: Michael O'Rourke, Office of Domestic Social Development, morourke@usccb.org
Julie Bodnar, Office of Domestic Social Development, jbodnar@usccb.org

⁵ Collyer, Sophie, et al. “Earning Requirements, Benefit Values, and Child Poverty Under the Child Tax Credit: Eliminating the Earnings Requirement Does More to Impact Child Poverty than Increasing Benefit Levels.” Columbia CPSP, 5 March 2019, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/2019/child-tax-credit-earnings-requirement>.



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG

October 26, 2022

Dear Senator/Representative:

The post-*Roe* world presents uncertainties yet, amid them, an historic opportunity to redouble efforts toward a culture of life that respects and supports the dignity of every person at every stage. As you continue your work responding to current challenges and assess your priorities for the 118th Congress, we implore you to place a high priority on policies that advance the health, safety, and flourishing of women, children, and families.

In the first part of this letter, we share our vision for an authentically life-affirming society that prioritizes the well-being of families. Following this letter, we append specific policy recommendations to assist you in developing legislation to advance these goals.

A Call for “Radical Solidarity”

The Supreme Court’s decision in the *Dobbs* case is an extraordinary step forward in our nation’s journey to respect the dignity of every person, regardless of age, race, immigration status, or any other factor. But that journey does not end with *Dobbs*. We are praying and working for changes in hearts and minds, circumstances and policy, that will help everyone to treasure each and every fellow human being in a society oriented to supporting children and their parents. In other words, we hope for the day when abortion is unthinkable because society has successfully reckoned with the challenges of raising children in the modern world and has decided to make the full flourishing of children and their families the highest goal, without anyone being excluded. To paraphrase St. John, our support for children and families should be more than “speech and words”: it should be expressed in “deed and truth,” in policy, organization, and action (1 John 3:18).

In “[Standing with Moms in Need](#),” we encourage a society in which the legal protection of human life is accompanied by profound care for mothers and their children. We continue to exhort our nation to prioritize the well-being of women, children, and families with both material resources and personal accompaniment so that no woman ever feels forced to choose between her future and the life of her child.

Ultimately, we call for what Saint John Paul II described as “radical solidarity” with mothers, babies (born and preborn) and families throughout each person’s entire lifespan. This is “a call to friendship and compassion rooted in the truth that we are made to love our neighbor as ourselves.”¹

Promoting the Welfare of Women and Families

There are serious cultural, social, economic, and spiritual challenges that face women, families, and children today. These are challenges that concern the common good. Ensuring that no children grow up in poverty, that parents have time away from work to care for them, that families are formed and remain intact, that the healthcare necessary for healthy moms and children is affordable, that workplace policies respect pregnant and nursing mothers, that child

¹ *Building a Culture of Life in a Post-Roe World*, Statement by Archbishop William E. Lori, Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, October 2022, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/rfp-22-chairman-statement-FINAL.pdf>

care is affordable and high quality but also not forced on families by financial pressures, that no children are hungry or homeless, that toxic chemicals do not cause babies to have birth defects or cancer, that immigrant families be treated in accord with their inviolable dignity – all of these goals require the cooperation of all and the exclusion of none. Goals like these cannot be achieved by individual efforts alone and will necessarily require collaborative work on the part of our government leaders.

The Economy and the Family

In attempting to address these challenges, we ask you to consider the Church’s bedrock principle that the economy must always be ordered to support the family. Wherever the economy undermines the family and children, it should be changed. We note the Second Vatican Council’s assertion that “The entire process of productive work... must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life, above all to his domestic life, especially in respect to mothers of families...”²

This, of course, is a goal that is not just for the government alone, but in partnership with all actors in the economy.

Work Life Supporting Healthy Families

This worldview of prioritizing the support of the family is especially poignant as families are confronted with tensions between the demands of work and the costs of family life. As Pope John Paul II wrote, when considering the work of women in “nearly every sector of life”: “The *true advancement of women* requires that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role.”³

We would add that men’s advancement in the workplace also must not come at the cost of their indispensable role as fathers. Accordingly, we must ensure that public policy never replaces the role of families but, rather, empowers them,⁴ and that, as we support families in need, we are mindful to not inadvertently perpetuate a state of need.

What would such a society and workplace really look like? Every sector of society would enjoy more stability and thrive if young people could more authentically value themselves and one another, form healthy, committed relationships, marry, and have children with confidence that their communities and society would really support them, no matter what obstacles they face.

Inclusion of Immigrant and Mixed-Status Families

In speaking about the relationship between families and the economy, we must also recognize the central role of immigrant families within our society. In a country fundamentally shaped by the contributions of immigrants, both culturally and economically, we cannot accept policies that unjustly exclude newcomers, especially when we continue to rely on—and collectively benefit from—their labors. With a strong scriptural foundation,⁵ the social doctrine of the Church clearly affirms that the “families of migrants have the right to the same protection

² *Gaudium et Spes*, 67.

³ *Laborem Exercens*, 19.

⁴ See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 214 (citing *Familiaris Consortio*, 45).

⁵ See, e.g., Matthew 25:31–46, which was the basis for this recent reflection:

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Migration%20and%20the%20Judgement%20of%20the%20Nations.pdf>

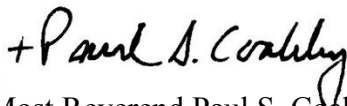
as that accorded other families,” including “the right to respect for their own culture and to receive support and assistance towards their integration into the community to which they contribute.”⁶ Immigrant workers in particular, whether seasonal, undocumented, or otherwise, must be treated “not as mere tools of production but as persons.”⁷

A Way Forward

We are encouraged that members of both parties in the Senate and the House are putting forward new legislation on issues that directly impact mothers and children, and we are grateful for the time and effort going into these proposals. We implore you to work together to find bipartisan solutions and ensure that these and other similar legislative proposals are given high priority. We hope with a particular concern that we all can agree on coming to the aid of pregnant and single parenting women in need, so that they will have the support, comfort, and hope that they require to build their lives for the better and realize their aspirations.

Following this letter, please find a non-exhaustive list of policy recommendations that we urge you to consider in your deliberations. Bipartisan collaboration is essential to accomplishing any improvements. We stand ready to work with you to bring forward solutions in light of these aspirations and encourage long-term and ongoing dialogue on how the policies and laws of our country can be improved to support all children and families.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Most Reverend Salvatore J. Cordileone
Archbishop of San Francisco
Chairman, Committee on Laity, Marriage,
Family Life and Youth



Most Reverend Mario E. Dorsonville
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington
Chairman, Committee on Migration

⁶ *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, art. 12.

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 66.



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Policy Recommendations to Support Women and Families

October 2022

Pregnant Workers Fairness Act: Women in low-wage and physically demanding jobs are often denied pregnancy-related accommodations and are terminated from their employment or forced to take leave without pay. USCCB [supports](#) efforts to make the workplace more receptive to women and their preborn children by requiring employers to provide short-term, reasonable accommodations during pregnancy, such as being able to carry a bottle of water, a stool for jobs involving long periods of standing, or lighter duty for jobs entailing heavy lifting. No woman should be forced to risk her child's health, miscarriage, preterm birth, economic security, or losing insurance just because she requests a pregnancy-related accommodation.

Child Tax Credit: The USCCB supports the Child Tax Credit and has offered [principles](#) calling for its improvement. The credit currently excludes too many children in need. Congress can better support families by making the credit fully refundable, without a minimum income threshold, in order to have the biggest impact on the lowest-income families; continuing to make mixed-status families eligible for the credit; making the credit available for the year before birth; ensuring that the credit does not undermine the building of families; and not offsetting the costs of the credit by cutting programs that serve those most in need.

PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act: Due to gaps in the law, millions of mothers were left unprotected under the Break Time for Nursing Mothers Act passed in 2010. We [encourage](#) Congress to correct this unintended result by passing legislation requiring employers to extend to a broader group of working mothers simple accommodations - such as a reasonable break time and a place other than a bathroom - to express breastmilk at their places of employment.

Pregnancy Resource Centers: Pregnancy resource centers are community-based, non-profit providers that seek to meet the needs of pregnant women. These centers offer an array of assistance, such as providing critical health information on pregnancy, labor, and delivery, basic medical services such as ultrasound, material assistance such as clothing, diapers, formula, and even housing, assistance with child care, and parenting classes for mothers as well as fathers. Providing a tax credit for private donations to support these centers will strengthen their ability to serve the needs of women.

Paid Family Leave: The USCCB has supported and continues to support a federal paid family leave policy. At the same time, we encourage a funding mechanism that will not be unduly burdensome to lower-income organizations and individuals, will not penalize larger families, and will not destabilize existing social service programs.

Child Care and Pre-Kindergarten Programs: Increasing costs along with a shortage of accessible centers have made it increasingly difficult for working parents to find quality and affordable child care. Improving access to child care and pre-kindergarten options is another way to support working-parent families. This should be done in a way that avoids further entrenching the economic situation in which families that desire to have a parent provide care in the home are

unable to do so. Additionally, the faith-based sector has led in quality child care and early childhood programming for decades, and we urge that it be included in any early childhood or expanded pre-kindergarten program proposals.

Marriage Penalties: A stable and healthy marriage generally provides a powerful means of avoiding poverty and the best setting for children. Unfortunately, numerous tax provisions and social programs disadvantage married couples. As a result, some people are discouraged from marrying, which can contribute to more mothers being pregnant within the difficult context of an unstable relationship, or single and facing greater economic or care challenges. The USCCB supports rectifying marriage penalties, such as with Supplemental Security Income benefits, without leaving anyone worse off. Relatedly, supports for those in need should be designed or complemented to not inadvertently exacerbate our nation's fatherlessness crisis.

Housing: Access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is essential for the well-being of families. Housing policy should increase the supply of quality housing by encouraging and funding production, including through support for the National Housing Trust Fund and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC); preserve the affordable housing that does exist, including public housing; significantly expand rental assistance so it is available to all households in need; and encourage equal housing opportunities for all, including by opposing unjust housing discrimination and addressing racial disparities in homeownership.

Maternal and Child Health: The USCCB's [health care principles](#) state that policies must respect life and dignity, honor conscience rights, and ensure that care is accessible to all, truly affordable, comprehensive, and of high quality. We call for policies that address maternal mortality and morbidity in the United States and advance the well-being of mothers and their children. These include ensuring affordable and continuous health coverage such as by extending Medicaid postpartum coverage to 12 months, promoting best practices in maternal health care delivery, addressing racial disparities in health care, investing in community-based models of care to support pregnant and postpartum women and infants outside the delivery room, improving care and access to care in rural areas, supporting the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and adequately funding Medicaid for U.S. territories.

Nutrition: Congress should support and strengthen programs that feed hungry families like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Assistance Program (CSFP) and ensure these programs reach all those in need. These programs must be safeguarded from harmful cuts or changes that lessen their effectiveness or accessibility. Nutrition programs in U.S. territories should be moved to a permanent basis of parity with the states.

Education: We encourage the development of policies for secondary and higher education that will strengthen pregnant and parenting students' rights and opportunities to learn and build the life of their dreams, without fear that their child will put their future at risk.

Healthy Relationships: When people know their own great worth and that of others, rather than make each other part of what Pope Francis calls “throwaway culture,” they are less likely to face crisis pregnancies and more likely to be prepared to welcome children. The USCCB has supported the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program, the [Healthy Relationships Act](#), and measures preventing and responding to domestic violence, such as elements of the [Violence Against Women Act](#) and its recent incorporation of the Choose Respect Act. We encourage Congress to consider additional ways to cultivate respect, strengthen relationship and parenting skills, and protect the vulnerable.

Adoption Support: The USCCB supports laws and programs that encourage adoption and support adoptive families. The [Adoption Tax Credit Refundability Act of 2021](#) is one example of such a policy. The Act would make it less financially burdensome for low-income families to adopt by making the Adoption Tax Credit refundable. It is also critical that as many adoption agencies as possible be allowed to serve without fear of being discriminated against by the government for their beliefs in how they honor a child’s right to a mother and father (and for this reason we also support the [Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act](#)).

Environmental Policies to Ensure the Health of Women and Children: Environmental policy must include measures to ensure that harmful chemicals do not cause adverse health effects. Protecting the health of vulnerable populations like pregnant women and young children should be an obvious component of a broader strategy. One example of this would be the [PFAS Action Act](#), which would protect pregnant and nursing mothers and children from cancer, birth defects, and other maladies, as well as [methane regulations](#) which address the disproportionate impacts of pollution on the health of underprivileged populations, including many mothers and children.

Inclusion of Immigrant and Mixed-Status Families: Overlaying all of these recommendations is an expectation that each be applied to immigrant and mixed-status families in accordance with their God-given dignity. Attempts to limit the ability of immigrant and mixed-status families to avail themselves of programs and policies designed to uplift and strengthen families are generally incompatible with the common good and can constitute a grave moral injustice. This principle equally applies to those policies, intentionally or otherwise, that exclude noncitizen workers from the right to dignified working conditions, a just wage, and family unity. The USCCB will continue to support laws and programs that respect the lives and dignity of noncitizens, such as the bipartisan [Farm Workforce Modernization Act](#), and oppose those that undermine these objectives.



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May 20, 2022

Dear Senator/Representative:

Families struggling to make ends meet received much needed relief in 2021 through an expanded Child Tax Credit. They were able to use the credit to meet basic needs, with many spending it on food, utility bills, rent or mortgage payments, clothing, and education costs.¹ This credit was extremely effective at reducing child poverty, with some reports indicating a nearly 30 percent decrease.² With the expanded credit now expired, child poverty is rising sharply.³ Addressing this poverty is a moral imperative of the highest priority.⁴ Rising inflation impacts lower-income families the most, making it even more expensive to raise children. An expanded Child Tax Credit is a tool that can offset the impact of inflation and provide immediate relief to these families.

We are encouraged that Congress is considering improving the Child Tax Credit and we urge you to continue this work. As you deliberate on how best to proceed, we ask you to keep the following principles in mind.

- 1. The credit should be fully refundable, without a minimum income threshold, in order to have the biggest impact on the lowest-income families.** The current Child Tax Credit is structured in a way that prevents millions of children from receiving the maximum credit because their families do not have enough earnings to qualify. It is critical that the most economically vulnerable children receive the full benefit of the credit. Doing so targets the benefit to those most in need. Tying eligibility or benefit amounts to earnings or work requirements for the parents could limit the ability of the credit to reach children in the most distressed situations. Instead, the credit should be kept fully refundable and available, so the poorest children receive its full value.
- 2. The credit should continue to include mixed-status families.** Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) filers who are parents of U.S.-citizen children are currently able to claim the Child Tax Credit for their eligible children. This eligibility should be retained in any future iterations of the credit. We urge you not to enact any provisions that would reduce or eliminate the credit for U.S.-citizen children, regardless of their parents' immigration status. The USCCB has long advocated for children of immigrant families to be included in such antipoverty programs.
- 3. The credit should be available for the year before birth.** Pregnant mothers should be able to claim the credit retroactively for the time of pregnancy in the year before birth for the benefit of their unborn children. Many families experience financial stress during pregnancy. The Child Tax Credit can aid new and growing families at a critical time.
- 4. The credit should not undermine the building of families.** Any changes made to the credit should continue to support and strengthen families, without financially disincentivizing marriage or otherwise harming family formation and growth. The credit should be fully available to each child, no matter the size of the family.

¹ Kids Count Data Center, "[Most Common Uses of 2021 Child Tax Credit Payments: Food, Utilities, Housing, Clothes.](#)"

² See, e.g., Center on Poverty and Social Policy, "[Sixth Child Tax Credit Payment Kept 3.7 Million Children Out of Poverty in December.](#)"

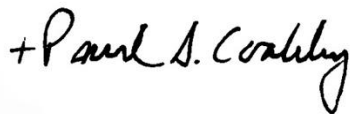
³ See, e.g., Center on Poverty and Social Policy, "[Monthly Poverty Remains Elevated in February.](#)"

⁴ *Economic Justice for All*, no. 170.

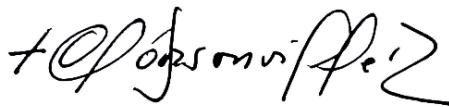
5. **The credit should not be offset by cutting programs that serve those most in need.** The debate around public spending for the common good often includes discussion of ways to finance such investments. The cost of an improved Child Tax Credit should not be borne by the most disadvantaged among us. Essential programs that serve those most in need should not be pitted against each other. As you weigh appropriate ways to finance an improved Child Tax Credit, we reiterate that “the tax system should raise adequate revenues to pay for the public needs of society, especially to meet the basic needs of the poor...[and] should be structured according to the principle of progressivity, so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation.”⁵

We understand this conversation is underway at a time when the economy is faced with rising inflation. Appropriate monetary policy should be used to address this challenge. At the same time, we must address the effects of inflation for those who are most vulnerable, including children in poverty. The U.S. bishops have long taught that “policies and programs to reduce unemployment and poverty must not ignore a potential inflationary impact. These complexities and trade-offs are real and must be confronted, but they are not an excuse for inaction. They should not paralyze us in our search for a more just economy.”⁶ Especially in this moment of economic uncertainty, we urge you to take action to ensure the progress made in the fight against child poverty this past year is not lost and that we build on these gains. We appreciate your work towards this goal thus far and stand ready to work with you to achieve it.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Reverend Mario E. Dorsonville
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington
Chairman, Committee on Migration



Most Reverend William E. Lori
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Most Reverend Salvatore J. Cordileone
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Chairman, Committee on Laity, Marriage,
Family Life and Youth

⁵ *Economic Justice for All*, no. 202.

⁶ *Economic Justice for All*, no. 293.