



CIRCLE *of* PROTECTION

April 23, 2021

Dear President Biden:

The Circle of Protection is a coalition of church bodies and related ministries representing the diversity of Christianity in this country - Latino Churches, Historic Black Churches, Protestants and Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches, Pentecostals, and Peace Churches. Together, the church bodies in the Circle of Protection have close to 100 million members. We are united across theological, sociological, and political differences by our shared Christian faith and the motivation it inspires to make our nation and world more consistent with the fact that God loves all people. This is how Jesus announced his public ministry, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." (Luke 4:8).

President Biden is making three major proposals to Congress in his first 100 days. The American Rescue Plan addresses immediate needs, especially among people and communities who have been hit hard by the pandemic. It is now being implemented. The recently announced American Jobs Plan is intended to foster sustained prosperity and, at the same time, address long-standing racial and economic injustices and also climate change. The American Families Plan, yet to be released, is reported to propose policies and systems to help the nation's families flourish and for that we are grateful. In response, the Circle of Protection offers faith-based, poverty-focused reflections on each plan in turn, hoping to inform our church members, the public, and members of Congress as legislation on the Jobs and Families plans is considered.

This letter is about the American Jobs Plan. We are not experts on all of its many provisions, and we do not agree on every issue. However, we all agree on four principles, grounded in our common values and priorities rooted in our faith and scripture.

1) We support policies that will allow low-wage workers to increase their EARNED income. The Circle of Protection has focused on protecting anti-poverty programs for more than a decade. But the wages of lower-income workers have been nearly stagnant for several decades. Overdue public investment in infrastructure will promote sustained prosperity and, at the same time, provide lots of good jobs. Infrastructure doesn't need to be limited to roads and bridges, and some infrastructure will boost employment in low-income communities on an ongoing basis. Making high-speed internet universally available will help low-income communities, especially depressed rural areas, come alive economically. Better public transportation will make it possible for people in low-income communities to get to centers of employment, which are often on the outskirts of our cities. Our traditions affirm the dignity of work and the rights of workers to productive work, decent and fair wages, freedom to organize and join unions, respect for private property, and economic initiative.

2) We share the goal of a more just, sustainable and prosperous economy. We should aim to come out of the pandemic a better country than we were before, with changes in the structure of our economy that provide more opportunity to low-income people and also protect the environment that sustains us. We do not need to choose between help for people in poverty, care for nature, and economic growth. We can and should pursue all three goals at the same time. For example, investment in affordable housing and clean, lead-free drinking water will especially benefit people of color and low-income people, but the whole country will benefit

from improved health in these communities, especially among children. Retrofitting old buildings can reduce carbon emissions and, at the same time, improve housing conditions and open new and productive job opportunities.

3) **We support raising revenues from corporations and high-income Americans.** To reduce the risk of financial crisis in the future, we support paying for needed public investments by rolling back some of the 2017 tax cuts. Progressive carbon taxation should also be considered; it would raise revenue and, at the same time, reduce carbon emissions. The chasm between rich and poor in our country has widened over the past decade - especially during the pandemic, even as child hunger has soared. We need to invest in a better future for everyone in America, and it's only right that more be required of those to whom much has been given (Luke 12:48).

4) **We call on our elected officials to work together across party lines for the common good, with particular concern for the vulnerable.** Major legislation should be carefully reviewed in committees, with attention to constructive ideas from both parties. While there is not bipartisan agreement on all of the policies in the American Jobs Plan, some of its proposals have a history of bipartisan support. As the two parties compete, poverty and injustice should be bipartisan concerns.

The Hebrew prophets were clear that nations sometimes need to make big changes so that all can thrive, and we think now is such a time.

Rev. Dr. Paul Baxley, Executive Coordinator, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Rev. David Beckmann, President Emeritus, Bread for the World

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Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

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Rev. Carlos L. Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together

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Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President and Founder, National Latino Evangelical Association

Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada

Rev. Adam Taylor, President, Sojourners

Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder and Ambassador, Sojourners

Rev. Cecilia Williams, President and CEO, Christian Community Development Association

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, CEO, Skinner Institute, and Co-Convener of the National African American Clergy Network

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary, National Council of Churches