

**Washington Interreligious Staff Community (WISC) Urges Congress to Support Bold, Equitable Build
Back Better Legislation**
September 17, 2021

As members of the Washington Interreligious Staff Community, a network with over 70 national religious organizations and denominations from a variety of different faiths, we come together to offer policy proposals that together can enable our communities, nation, and world to flourish. As we emerge from the depths of the COVID crisis and the economic fallout, we are deeply grateful that House Committees have prioritized bold legislation that will bring about a just, sustainable, and inclusive recovery, one that addresses the systemic issues and racial injustices laid bare by the pandemic. While all of our organizations do not work on each of these the issues below, we are united in our belief that the time for bold action is now.

We ask Congress to hold firm on \$3.5 trillion dollars of investment targeted at vulnerable families and communities. We also urge members of Congress to ensure that the following priority provisions already passed by Committees of jurisdiction remain in the final recovery reconciliation bill:

Support basic human needs and allow all individuals to live with dignity:

- Make permanent the expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the refundable portion of the Child Tax Credit from the American Rescue Plan. This could cut childhood poverty by nearly 50%.
- Institute a 12 week national, permanent family and medical paid leave program and create affordable childcare.
- Include \$90 billion in housing assistance to expand housing choice vouchers and address American's housing crisis
- Expand the summer EBT program to all eligible children to prevent spikes in hunger during the summer months when kids aren't in school.
- Lift the ban on SNAP and TANF for people with drug felony convictions.
- Make high-speed internet accessible, affordable, and nationwide, especially in rural areas.

Adequately fund the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities to tribal nations:

- Invest in Indian water rights settlements, Indian Health Services, tribal climate resilience and adaption, and tribal housing.

Permanently close the Medicaid Health Gap and strengthen access to quality, affordable health care:

- Permanently close the Medicaid Coverage Gap in Non-Expansion States by providing coverage for the first time to 2.2 million people living below the poverty line in the 12 states.
- Require state Medicaid programs to cover incarcerated individuals 30 days before release to ensure better care transitions.

- Close the Gap in Medicaid Funding to the U.S. territories.

Include a pathway to citizenship for essential immigrant workers, farmworkers, people with DACA, TPS, and DED, and their families in the upcoming recovery packages.

Address the climate crisis with an emphasis on environmental justice:

- Include the Clean Electricity Payment Program, which will put the US on the path toward 80% clean electricity by 2030 while helping to address fossil fuel pollution which has an outsized impact on disadvantaged communities. .
- Direct at least 40% of the investments to BIPOC and low-income communities that have been forced to bear an unequal burden of pollution and the pandemic.

Invest in global and domestic manufacturing to produce enough vaccines to end the COVID-19 pandemic:

- \$2B for global and domestic vaccine production and \$0.5B for domestic manufacturing capacity for vaccines to retrofit facilities and launch critical new vaccine production to begin producing 8 billion vaccine doses needed to reach 4 billion people, especially in low- and middle-income countries. This money would support both domestic and regional facilities around the world.

Pay for these historic investments by raising taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations to bring more fairness and equity to our tax code. We must raise responsible revenues to afford these necessary investments while addressing America's growing chasm in income and wealth inequality. Within the last year alone, the combined wealth of U.S. billionaires grew nearly 45% while child hunger soared. This includes:

- Raising the corporate tax rate at least 26.5%.
- Restoring the top marginal tax rate to what it was during the Tax Cuts and Job Act.
- Ensuring wealthy individuals don't get major tax breaks from living off investment income.
- Prohibiting wealthy families from passing on millions of dollars in income gains completely tax-free.
- Closing tax loopholes that allows U.S. corporations to transfer their wealth offshore to avoid paying taxes.
- Cracking down on tax evasion by the wealthy and corporations by strengthening IRS enforcement and information technology.

Reject additional money for the already-bloated Pentagon budget:

- Ensure that the recovery packages meant for infrastructure and jobs don't increase the United States' spending on the military and nuclear weapons or funnel money into the pockets of defense contractors.

This is the moment to build back in a way that addresses the root injustices that have left so many communities more vulnerable than others. We must build back an economy that provides dignified

employment for all, invests in vulnerable families and communities, leaves the world a better home for our children, and that recognizes our stewardship of, not domination over, God's creation.

These proposals are bold, imaginative, and entirely within our grasp if we focus our collective will and resources on this defining struggle of our time.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee

Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice

Church World Service

Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Creation Justice Ministries

The Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

Leadership Council for Women Religious

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)

National Council of Jewish Women

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Justice Team

Sojourners

United Church of Christ justice and witness ministries

Union for Reform Judaism

The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

Unitarian Universalist Association