

February 3, 2020

Representative Carolyn Maloney
Chairwomen
House Government Oversight Committee
2308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Jim Jordan
Ranking Member
House Government Oversight Committee
2056 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Maloney and Ranking Member Jordan:

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations, representing millions of diverse people of faith across the United States, are writing to you in support of the four hearings taking place on February 5th and 6th regarding various proposed rules and regulatory changes that would negatively impact children across the country.

Over the past year, agencies across the administration have proposed damaging rules and regulations. The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) misguided proposal to replace the poverty measure from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to a "Chained CPI" would, over time, expose millions of children to unnecessary hardship. By redefining the poverty line, this adjustment would force children to lose access to free or reduced school lunches and health coverage through Medicare or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recent proposed rule to redefine the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing requirements would allow communities to ignore essential racial desegregation obligations, further entrenching segregation and amplifying the cycle of poverty trapping many low-income families and children. The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed rule that would limit states' usage of broad-based categorical eligibility would create more barriers for families to access much needed food assistance, therefore forcing 3.1 million people to lose Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) benefits and put 982,000 children at risk of losing access to free school lunches. Finally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed rule to alter the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard would roll back mercury pollution standards, thereby exposing pregnant women and children to a potent neurotoxin emitted by coal and oil burning power plants that is particularly dangerous to their health.

What these proposed rules all have in common is a deleterious effect on our nation's children. From putting food on the table and a roof over their heads to ensuring clean air and water, children look to us for guidance and security. When our federal government enacts regulatory changes like these, it is shirking its fundamental duty to protect God's creation – especially the most vulnerable - and uphold the common good, which includes future generations. Most of the families affected by these proposed rules already struggle to make ends meet and provide for their children – the last thing our government should be doing is making their lives even harder.

When taken together, these proposed rules are striking examples of how the current administration has gone out of its way to implement policies that harm vulnerable children

and their families. When taken into consideration with other proposed rules and regulatory changes this administration has considered and/or implemented, a clear pattern emerges. These actions and proposed actions appear to be part of a broader, systematic effort to undermine programs that help those who are struggling and need assistance. Any government action that forces vulnerable families to face increased hardship is unethical and a shameful reflection of our priorities as a nation.

As faith organizations, we believe that God dwells in each human soul, and that each person has the right to live with dignity and access to basic necessities in a safe and sustainable environment. The federal government has a moral obligation to help those in need of assistance and ensure that people have equal opportunity to live into their potential and contribute to their communities. We encourage these hearings as a meaningful form of oversight that will help hold our government accountable for its efforts to make life harder for families who are already struggling, thereby threatening the health and well-being of so many children.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists
Center for Calling & Christian Leadership
Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Faith in Public Life
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Franciscan Action Network
ICNA Council for Social Justice
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Dallas, TX
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Polygon Education Fund
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Office of Public Witness
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Mercy Justice Team
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Women of Reform Judaism

Interfaith Leader Quotes for Hearing on Child Poverty in House Government Oversight Committee

"Pope Francis said that the measure of society can be found in the way it treats those most in need. Children living in poverty are the most vulnerable and the least equipped to advocate for their own well being. The OMB's proposal to change the poverty measure ignores the needs of these children, especially in rural communities. Chained-CPI will undercount poverty, remove life-saving benefits, and take food off the tables of our neighbors. This is not the faithful way forward."

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

"This Administration continues to deny the very real needs of low-income children and families who struggle with hunger. As a Jewish organization, grounding our work in Jewish values and ideals is not a mere slogan; it is the vital prism through which we understand what it means to be a nation that looks after its most vulnerable, particularly its children. We applaud Chairwoman Maloney and the House Oversight Committee for holding these hearings, which underscore the callous and cruel scheming by the Trump Administration to weaken vital safety net programs, including making it more difficult for nearly one million children to access food at school. As a nation, we are better than this. It is our responsibility to ensure that we protect and support our children so that they can grow and thrive."

Abby J. Leibman, President & CEO, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

"The regulatory changes proposed by the administration imperil the already frayed safety net for children living in poverty. In the spirit of St. Francis, we call on the House of Representatives to intervene on behalf of this vulnerable population, America's impoverished children."

Stephen Schneck, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network

"Jewish tradition teaches that feeding the hungry and helping the poor is not just an individual responsibility, but rather a communal responsibility. We are taught that if a person lives in a city for a month, they are obligated to contribute to the collection to feed the poor of the city (*Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 8a-9b*).

Caring for the most vulnerable – especially the millions of children suffering from poverty and hunger every day in the United States – should be a priority for all of us, including our government. But rather than strengthening the programs that help our most vulnerable children, the current administration is threatening their health and well-being through budget cuts and damaging regulatory changes. For children to thrive, they need adequate housing, nutritious meals, and safe drinking water. We applaud the House Oversight Committee for prioritizing the needs of our children and holding the administration accountable."

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

“Unfortunately, the proposed policy changes of the current administration will have devastating impact on the poor families and their children. These policies should be condemned and reversed.”

Dr. Zahid Bukhari, Executive Director, ICNA Council for Social Justice

“There is no way that a person can be a fully faithful Christian without caring deeply about poverty and the children suffering because of it. To ignore or, worse yet, support policies that hurt these children is both unjust and sinful.”

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston, Executive Director of the Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

"We are called by our faith to care for the vulnerable and challenged by our national values to promote the welfare of our children. Catholic sisters have been serving the children of this country for almost 300 years. We know from our own experience that if communities are to thrive, all children and families in those communities must have access to the care and services they need and to which they are entitled.

We find this administration’s continued attempts to dismantle programs that support children and families deeply troubling. We thank the House Government Oversight Committee for examining the systematic manner in which various agencies of the executive branch have sought to use their rule making authority to cripple programs and dismantle regulations designed to safeguard this country’s most precious resource, our children.”

Ann Scholz, SSND, Associate Director for Social Mission, Leadership Conference of Women Religious

“A faithful government has a moral duty incorporating the values and priorities of this country. Our budget, laws and regulations serve as a foundation and as a cushion for those under our care and for those vulnerable members of our society who need extra support and protection. We call on the House members to consider those impacted negatively by their proposals or the President’s proposals and urge correction to benefit the common good of our sisters and brothers.”

Lawrence Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

“Vulnerable children, especially children in need of healthy food and safe shelter, must always be the top priority of our government, not the victims of cost saving budget cuts. Children must never be the victims of political maneuvering.”

Rev. J. Todd Bruning, Pastor, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Dallas, TX

“Quakers strive to practice equity and justice, and we support policies that promote these values. These proposed rules and regulatory changes do neither; rather, they undermine fundamental values and expose millions of children across the country to unnecessary hardship. These rules would eliminate access to free school lunches, expose young children to toxic chemicals, and perpetuate the cycle of poverty in these vulnerable lives. Instituting harmful regulations like these highlights this Administration’s failure to help those who need assistance the most – low-income families and children. The federal government has a moral obligation to help those who are in need. We stand firmly opposed to government actions that lack compassion and common sense. We support oversight efforts that will hold the Administration accountable for its actions that threaten the health and well-being of children across the country.”

Diane Randall, Executive Director, Friends Committee on National Legislation

“Time and time again, Jesus lifted up the poor and proclaimed God’s presence among them. Today, as those who live in poverty are continually vilified and even criminalized, we who follow Jesus cannot stand by and let the indignities continue. If these rules are passed, more vulnerable children will fall into the margins, more families will be endangered, and our society will suffer.”

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

“As a Baptist organization, we take Biblical admonitions very seriously. Thus, I commend this oversight effort as it is being done in the spirit of the countless Biblical texts demanding just laws and fair and compassionate treatment of the poor, including children. This oversight is needed since these proposals are counter to the word of God. God calls on us to have fair weights and measures, to leave some grain and other crops in the fields so the needy families can eat, and for us to in general treat poor people as we want to be treated ourselves. The Psalmist says that God defends the poor, and what we need in this time is to use our hands and feet and minds and Hearings, to do the work of justice and to defend the poor.”

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Head of Communion, Alliance of Baptists