

April 29, 2020

Dear Member of Congress,

Our congregations, religious orders and organizations are helping to serve families and communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic on a daily basis. We ground our actions in values of protecting both God's creation and the most vulnerable among us. As our country responds to both the short term relief and longer term recovery, we need solutions that are sustainable for people and for the climate.

Implementing these solutions requires the U.S. to address the environmental and ecological degradation which, combined with interlocking inequities of wealth and health disparities, ethnic, racial and gender inequalities, have unmasked the disproportionate risks faced by low-wealth communities, communities of color, rural communities, Tribal and Indigenous communities, as well as the elderly. These populations have been hit particularly hard by COVID-19 and the resulting economic and social disruption. The long-standing issues of systemic racism and wealth disparity that have been highlighted by COVID-19 must be addressed in any relief and recovery packages.

The CARES Act and previous relief packages were a good start, and we know much more must be done to protect vulnerable communities and essential workers and to provide financial support to those who have lost income and/or livelihoods. Now that you have passed this and previous relief packages, we ask that in your role of oversight and accountability you ensure the Administration acts quickly and effectively to deliver this relief to those who need it most.

In future packages, we urge you to craft both short-term relief and long-term recovery measures that create jobs, meet basic needs, and save lives and have the co-benefit of creating a more environmentally sustainable and resilient economy for all.

In particular, we ask in the short-term that you:

- **Provide funding and resources to communities historically and currently impacted by environmental injustice to address health risks caused by air and water pollution, and to create more resilience to future disasters.** Prior to this pandemic, Indigenous, African American and Latino communities were already affected by poor quality air and water, had higher than average rates of respiratory illnesses, cancers and other health challenges owing in part to the [disproportionately high number of polluting industries](#) located in their communities. [Emerging data now indicates](#) they are being hospitalized for COVID-19 infections at a higher rate than other ethnic groups. [New studies show](#) that even a marginal decrease in air pollution could have had an enormous impact in the number of lives saved among COVID-19 patients. Because air pollution exacerbates asthma and other respiratory conditions that increase the deadliness of this virus, reducing air pollution now is more important than ever. In addition to ensuring that industrial facilities and other companies significantly reduce pollution of our air, water and land, we ask that you increase funding for grants available to impacted communities,

such as the EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants program, to address health risks caused by air and water pollution and create more resiliency to future disasters.

- **Place a nationwide moratorium on shut-offs of essential utilities including water, electricity, and heat as well as increase funding for energy efficiency programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) that benefit low-income households.** Families around the country are facing the imminent threat of utility shut-offs because of economic inequities. Ensuring that families have energy security and access to clean water during a pandemic can be the difference between life and death. Swiftly utilizing the LIHEAP funding appropriated in previous relief packages and increasing the funding available for the future will provide much-needed economic relief and support public health.
- **Reserve any financial support given to the fossil fuel industry to specifically support safety, economic relief, and transition for fossil fuel workers.** Fossil fuels contribute to air pollution that makes our communities more susceptible to the virus by contributing to underlying health conditions and emit greenhouse gases that cause the climate crisis and lead to more frequent and severe weather events and disasters. We urge you to prohibit payments to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and waivers of royalty payments for oil and gas extraction on public lands. Waiving royalty payments for extractive industries also diminishes funding available to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which helps provide needed resources and jobs for local and state economies.
- **Provide foreign assistance for public health, humanitarian programs, food and nutrition security, clean water and sanitation, disaster preparedness and response in developing countries.** We know that developing countries will face greater challenges in addressing the economic hardships and health needs of their people during COVID-19 and future disasters. By supporting developing countries in their relief efforts, we also support our own recovery. If done right, these programs can both respond to the health pandemic and build climate resilience.

As communities of faith with members across the country, we pray for your moral leadership during this time of national and global crisis.

Sincerely,

Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice

Church World Service

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Creation Justice Ministries

Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action

Disciples Center for Public Witness

Faithful America

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Hazon

Interfaith Power & Light

Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

United Methodist Women