

May 27, 2020

United States Congress
Washington, DC

Dear Member of Congress:

As faith organizations across the country representing a broad spectrum of religious traditions, we are praying for a swift and just recovery from the current COVID-19 pandemic. The staggering loss of life and livelihoods demands a robust response that spans from relief to recovery. Our recent letters, signed by numerous faith organizations, urged action to provide economic relief directly to people most impacted, especially communities of color, address environmental concerns, and make health a top priority.

As Congress now works toward crafting an economic stimulus package, it should focus on creating jobs centered on sustainability and resiliency to both address recent devastating job losses and ensure long-term human health, economic, and environmental benefits for all. We ask that recovery measures prioritize new jobs for communities that are the most marginalized, including communities of color disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and financial and technical support to those communities and minority-owned businesses. Consultation with these communities is critical, especially for sovereign Tribal nations who have historically been excluded from the policy making process, resulting in harm to their well-being and livelihoods.

We question the ongoing investments in the fossil fuel industry, which has already seen significant financial resources recently from relief packages that were intended for small businesses. We join with other organizations across the globe and from a variety of sectors in calling for an end to fossil fuel subsidies and investments in fossil fuel infrastructure. Fossil fuels negatively impact the health and well-being of communities, particularly communities of color, whose infant mortality, asthma rates and exposure to high levels of greenhouse gas emissions are well above the national average.

We are very disappointed that the HEROES Act did not include assistance for our neighbors in developing countries. Many developing countries are already experiencing hardships from climate change and the economic impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns are contributing to hunger, poverty, and homelessness.

As efforts shift to long-term recovery, we urge you to:

- **Invest in sustainable infrastructure in all communities, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color.** These investments must include resources directed towards infrastructure that provides for clean air and water, increased access to broadband and public transportation, particularly for low income communities in remote rural areas. They should be allocated based on recommendations received through effective community consultations. Investing in these measures can reduce toxic waste and pollution in communities, begin to address the systemic economic and racial inequalities now being exposed by COVID-19. Sustainable infrastructure increases preparedness and builds community-level resilience to disasters, which benefits us all.

For example, investments such as the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund are essential to providing safe and affordable drinking water to communities, building climate resilience, and expanding economic opportunities for low-income communities and communities of color.

- **Pass recovery measures that transition away from and mitigate damage from fossil fuel dependence and support the expansion of clean energy.** We must improve human health and the health of God's creation by incentivizing the deployment of clean energy through the modernization of clean energy tax credits. The clean energy industry is facing significant disruptions and job losses at a time when we cannot afford to lose momentum in shifting to a clean energy economy. Support for industries such as wind, solar, energy storage, and energy efficiency will not only protect these growing sectors but also create well-paying new jobs.
- **Invest in conservation programs that provide jobs and build community resilience.** We urge you to put people to work by supporting programs that bolster the ability of the natural world to create community resilience for future disasters. We ask that you support efforts, such as the RECLAIM Act, to provide funding for environmental cleanup of abandoned coal mines and implement job training in these communities. Such funding offers the opportunity to protect public health and provides immediate employment for hard-hit communities. In addition, we urge you to support programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which create jobs and provides much needed outdoor recreation space for local communities.
- **Support our global neighbors in developing countries in their response and recovery efforts by investing in sustainable solutions that build resilience and address poverty, inequality and climate change including:** water infrastructure to support increased access to water for handwashing, promotion of hygiene, and clean water for drinking and cooking; off-grid renewable energy to ensure access to much needed energy for continued operation of health clinics and to improve their development outcomes; support for resilient food systems to meet the food security needs of hungry and impoverished communities by providing aid to smallholder farmers and local and regional food hubs; and targeted development programs to support small and medium enterprises with an emphasis on women. This aid should be delivered as grants so as to not contribute to developing country debt and include proper oversight mechanisms must be included to ensure that projects respect human rights and ecological integrity.

As a nation we must use this time to better prepare for future disasters and crises by reducing our health risks and addressing underlying economic and health disparities that make recovery more challenging. We have the opportunity in this moment to forge a sustainable recovery that promotes a healthy environment, allows us to be resilient to new crises, and builds communities centered on principles of justice and equity.

Sincerely,
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
Maryknoll Sisters Eastern Region USA
National Council of Churches USA
Sisters of Mercy Justice Team
Reconstructing Judaism
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
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