



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

November 18, 2021

Dear Mr. President and members of the United States Senate,

As a member of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a denomination of 3.3 million people throughout the United States and U.S. territories, we want to thank you for recently passing the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which will make strong investments in our nation's infrastructure, enhance climate resilience and increase economic opportunity in our communities. This action indicates that our government is not only assisting our people during challenges of living through a pandemic but also providing groundwork for a brighter future.

We also take this opportunity to call on you to support measures in the Build Back Better Act that represent a unique opportunity to advance our common good. These measures will help promote shared values of greater dignity and justice for all as they take up the needs of families and children living in poverty.

Our nation — through two administrations — has responded to this pandemic in historic ways. We urge your attention to the following measures not out of partisan stances but from our faith convictions that seek stronger paths of justice for all. As Christians, we are called by this path of justice to address racial disparities that have long existed in our country. The Build Back Better Act must include policies that seek to lessen the large gaps that exist in opportunities and outcomes in immigration, childhood poverty, community development, climate impacts and global vaccine access. We believe much good can be done with this package.

Immigration — As the nation's first sanctuary denomination, we continue to firmly support a pathway to earned citizenship for those in our country without legal status, as 500 pastors of the ELCA conveyed in a March 4 [letter](#) to Congress. This package recognizes our immigrant neighbors as integral members of our families, communities and society. We acknowledge how the \$100 billion in this reconciliation package for temporary protections and visa fairness makes crucial progress after decades of congressional inaction. Yet, as leaders in church and society, we also lament such temporary protections as meek measures in an otherwise transformational bill. We urge bold action toward full citizenship for the 11 million people without paperwork to prove their belonging in our country. Inaction has taken a heavy toll on our families, who deserve the opportunity to permanently live, work and travel without the threat of exploitation in the workplace or fear of separation.

Childhood Poverty — As a church we are committed to ending hunger, as an expression of God’s call to love and serve our neighbor. Our ministries throughout the nation serve their communities through food and nutrition programs, but we cannot achieve an end to hunger without strong federal programs that alleviate poverty. Therefore, we support making permanent the expansions of the earned income tax credit and the refundable portion of the child tax credit from the American Rescue Plan for an additional year. We cannot miss this opportunity to extend a policy measure that is already shown to cut childhood poverty by nearly 50%.

Community Development — Our houses of worship, social ministry organizations and faith leaders are actively involved in community development across the nation, and we recognize that additional funding to improve our neighborhoods will make a transformative difference for many of us — and especially those of us in the greatest need. Funding to increase access to housing and home affordability and resources dedicated to community development are critical components to any investment intended to increase economic mobility. With this understanding, we ask that Congress include at least \$200 billion in the Build Back Better Act to address these essential issues.

Climate — As a church that is called to steward God’s creation, we are working on the front lines of climate impacts. The effects of climate change intensify hunger, poverty and health problems and exacerbate existing economic and social injustices as the marginalized are disproportionately impacted. Building upon the recently passed infrastructure bill, the Build Back Better Act contains the largest investment in U.S. history to combat climate change and move the country to a sustainable, renewable-energy economy. It creates thousands of jobs while making the largest single investment in clean-energy-sector technology for buildings, transportation, industry and agriculture. It introduces climate-smart practices for rural American’s farmers, forest managers and ranchers. The bill addresses racial inequities by delivering 40% of the benefits of investments to disadvantaged communities, supporting capacity-building and creating a new, diverse Civilian Climate Corps, all of which bolster community resilience. We also support measures that put our nation on the path to reduce the carbon pollution that drives climate change while creating jobs and opportunities for all and vibrant, resilient communities. We ask Congress to include in this bill the \$555 billion necessary to move this country to resiliency via a just transition while creating thousands of jobs, assuring no one is left behind.

Vaccine Access — As a globally connected church, we in the ELCA understand that our lives are integrally linked with those of our siblings in different parts of the world. We are especially concerned about the negative health, economic and social impacts of COVID-19 in low- and middle-income countries. Because the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect many of these countries, we urge the U.S government to continue contributing resources to help end this global pandemic. COVID-19 vaccines are a critical piece of this goal, so we take this opportunity to ask that you include \$1.3 billion in the Build Back Better Act to support expanded global and domestic vaccine-production capacity, and other pandemic mitigation measures.

We share the convictions expressed in our 1991 social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*: “God works through the family, education, the economy, the state, and other structures necessary for life in the present age. God institutes governing authorities, for

example, to serve the good of society. [The ELCA] respects the God-given integrity and tasks of governing authorities and other worldly structures, while holding them accountable to God.” As bishops of the ELCA we look to our political leaders to use this opportunity to make significant and transformational progress in creating a robust and compassionate response to the needs of people living in poverty and vulnerable communities, needs that existed before the pandemic and are now starkly made plain because of COVID-19.

We thank you for making yourselves available to serve the good of society, and we pray for you as you work collaboratively to discern next steps and eventually pass the Build Back Better Act. Thank you for your service to our communities and our nation.

Sincerely,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop



The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew
Bishop, New Jersey Synod
Chair, Conference of Bishops



Deacon Sue Rothmeyer
Secretary

The Rev. Shelly Wickstrom
Bishop, Alaska Synod

The Rev. Ann Svennungsen
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The Rev. Susan Candea
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The Rev. Yehiel Curry
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The Rev. William (Bill) Gohl, Jr.,
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The Rev. Daniel G. Beaudoin
Bishop, Northwestern Ohio Synod

The Rev. Donald P. Kreiss
Bishop, Southeast Michigan Synod

The Rev. Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt
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The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee
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The Rev. Laurie Larson Caesar
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The Rev. Barbara J. Collins
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The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport
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The Rev. Susan J. Briner
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The Rev. Erik K.J. Gronberg
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