

June 30, 2005

Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As you begin working in earnest on the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill, we as the leaders of five mainline Protestant denominations want to take this opportunity to share some reflections as well as specific areas of interest within the bill.

In the Christian tradition, we are called to reflect upon Jesus' teaching that economic justice – and the manner in which we treat “the least of these” among us – is at the heart of morality. This teaching proceeds fully from the Old Testament imperative, common to all the Abrahamic faiths, that it is not enough to merely address the *effects* of poverty, hunger, and inequity through works of mercy; we are required to pursue works of justice that make poverty, hunger, and inequity obsolete. “And what does the Lord require of you,” the prophet Micah asks, “but to do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah's choice of verbs is instructive. We are not to *love* justice or *preach* justice, we are to *do* justice—to act, and, when necessary, to struggle.

Thus, the manner in which a nation uses its resources is one of the most concrete expressions of its shared moral values. Most Americans, regardless of their faith background, share a common set of values that should guide our federal spending. These values include compassion; service of the common good, particularly the weakest among us; and care for all God's people and God's creation, whether at home or abroad.

Our churches operate thousands of charities from the parochial to the international. Believe us when we tell you that neither we, nor our Evangelical brothers and sisters, nor our friends of other faiths have anywhere near the resources to turn back the rising tide of poverty in this country. We know that programs, whether governmental or non-profit, can change people's lives for the better. We are doing our part, but government must share in that partnership.

It is our belief that federal spending should not ask the poor to pay for a prosperity in which they cannot share. Viewing the federal appropriations process through this lens, we ask you to consider the following priorities in the FY'06 Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill:

- **Child Care:** One of the single greatest barriers to employment for the working poor of our nation is adequate quality child care - only one in seven eligible children actually receive assistance. *We ask that discretionary spending for child care assistance be increased.*
- **Housing:** We are strong supporters of efforts to ensure affordable housing and reduce homelessness—particularly the Section 8 Voucher Program, the Section 202 Elderly Housing Program, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Section 811 housing for persons with disabilities, and public housing. We have serious concerns regarding potential cuts to housing programs funded through HUD. *Housing programs should be funded at levels that will serve all in need, continue new investments and not sacrifice existing housing programs. We oppose moving the Community Development Block Grant Program from HUD to the*

Commerce Department. We urge the creation of the Affordable Housing Fund proposed in the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005.

- **Job Training:** We recognize the sense of dignity gained by an individual through employment. Job training and employment programs are vital in ensuring that the unemployed—including homeless persons and the under employed—of our country have an opportunity to secure employment, the ability to compete in the market place, and are able to earn enough to meet basic human needs. *Funding for job training and workforce investment should be increased.*
- **Social Services Block Grant:** SSBG provides critical services to more than 13 million low-income children, families, senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. Despite its contribution to the myriad of social service agencies across the country, the SSBG has been cut by \$1 billion dollars since 1995. *We support full funding of the SSBG to its original*

\$2.8 billion dollar level.

We hope that these reflections are helpful to you as you undertake your vital work. Together, let us pledge ourselves to creating a nation in which economic policies are infused with the spirit of the man who began his public ministry almost 2,000 years ago by proclaiming that God had anointed him “to bring good news to the poor.”

Please be assured that you are ever in our prayers as you seek to meet the challenges of public service.

Sincerely,

The Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold
Presiding Bishop and Primate
of the Episcopal Church, USA

The Right Reverend Mark Hanson
Presiding Bishop
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America

The Reverend Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.)

The Reverend John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Mr. James Winkler
General Secretary, General Board of Church
and Society
United Methodist Church