



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, US Senate
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader, US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Sen. McConnell, Sen. Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Rep. McCarthy:

Thank you for your service in these unprecedented times. As Congress continues its work on the COVID-19 emergency relief package, I am writing to offer support and express the concerns of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.7 million members in more than 9,300 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean.

Thank you for your bipartisan efforts in passing the previous two Covid-19 packages. As you work on the third package, I ask for your consideration of the priorities below:

- Economic stimulus measures should focus first on low-income and vulnerable communities. Such policies also have the strongest economic impact. Any bailouts and emergency assistance for major industries and businesses must be paired with comparable assistance for economically at-risk workers and vulnerable individuals.
- Increase and expand access to nutrition assistance to prevent families and individuals from going hungry. The CDC recommends people stockpile two weeks of food, but families living paycheck-to-paycheck cannot afford to do so. Others may face reduced paychecks because of reduced hours, and school closures will leave children without access to school lunches and breakfasts. Increase SNAP benefit levels and allow flexibility in use, one of the most effective ways to help stimulate the economy and enable stockpiling for self-quarantine.
- Strengthen, expand and modernize unemployment insurance in order to provide higher benefits, account for the changing workforce (such as the gig economy), and cover workers who may lose their jobs or face new caregiving responsibilities due to the virus (such as school closures). Expand unemployment eligibility to include people whose hours have been reduced due to decreased demand, those whose wages come primarily from tips, those who have run out of sick days, and high-risk populations who need to self-quarantine to protect themselves.

- As is done in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201), any additional employment-focused relief or stimulus legislation must expressly apply to employment at tax-exempt organizations by making tax credits and deductions applicable not just to income taxes, but to the taxes that nonprofits pay, such as payroll taxes. Further, Congress should also ensure that relief and stimulus legislation designed to assist for-profit businesses in the areas of unemployment insurance, employee retention and risk insurance must also address the unique challenges and realities that nonprofits face.

In addition, over 300 Lutheran social ministry organizations are on the front lines fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and caring for the most vulnerable Americans—seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, the homeless, children and more. They are doing extraordinary work protecting and caring for people in over 1,400 communities in 46 states. Over 150 years ago, Lutheran congregations took in orphans, seniors and those with disabilities after the Civil War. Today Lutheran social ministry is one of the largest health and human services networks in the country and, in particular, one of the largest that serves seniors in their homes and in residential care.

I urge you to include nonprofit organizations in the emergency relief package that is under consideration. Lutheran social ministry and other nonprofits are taking extraordinary measures to protect the most vulnerable and incurring major expenses and lost revenue. The draft Senate legislation included nonprofits, but excluded those that receive Medicaid and those with over 500 employees—organizations that serve people most in need. I ask you to include nonprofit organizations, including faith-based nonprofits that receive Medicaid funding and those with over 500 employees, in any emergency relief. It is imperative that nonprofit organizations be there to support our country through the crisis—and be there when it's over to rebuild families and communities.

As Christians, we join with many in other religions in announcing that God calls all people and governments to do justice and to give priority to the needs of the most vulnerable people—the aging, the young, the sick and those with disabilities. Therefore, we are committed to working as a church with other individuals, organizations and the government to ensure the continued support for the most vulnerable. We pray for the health and well-being of you, your families and your staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America