

Catholic Charities USA

Administrative and Legislative Priorities 119th Congress



About Catholic Charities USA

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) calls on you and all people of goodwill to consider the common good of the nation, with a particular concern for the vulnerable families and individuals we serve every day.

CCUSA is a national membership organization representing 168 diocesan Catholic Charities member agencies. These member agencies operate more than 3,300 service locations across 50 states, the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories. The diverse array of social services offered by agencies reached more than 16 million individuals in need last year.

The mission of CCUSA is to provide service to people in need, to advocate for justice in social structures and to call the church and other people of goodwill to do the same. For more than 114 years, the Catholic Charities community has advocated for just and fair policies that help people reach their full potential. Our Catholic tradition teaches that society, acting through government and civic organizations, has a special obligation to consider first the needs of persons and families who are poor and vulnerable.

The Catholic Charities Network at a Glance

These data points provide just a snapshot of the incredible impact Catholic Charities agencies have in communities across the country:

16M People served

168 Member agencies

28M Meals provided

40,000 Clients trained and placed in jobs

526,000 People received behavioral health and wellness services

828,000 Clients benefited from programs that prevent homelessness

116 Agencies served asylum-seekers and refugees

52 Disasters responded to throughout the U.S. and its territories

Our Policy Priorities for the 119th Congress

We respectfully submit the following requests and recommendations as a guide during the 119th Congress.

Protection of All Human Life

We uphold the sanctity and dignity of all human life from conception until natural death. Every day, Catholic Charities agencies serve persons who are created in God's image and likeness. Our faith and tradition call for the protection of human life and the preferential option for vulnerable people and those who are poor, including the unborn, vulnerable children, pregnant women, immigrants, the unemployed, seniors and people impacted by racial injustice.

Recommendations

Support policies and legislation that protect all human life from conception until natural death.

Religious Liberty

Historically, Catholic Charities agencies have enjoyed a cooperative partnership with government at all levels to work for the common good. Such cooperation has been predicated on valuing diverse perspectives and mutual respect. The importance of broad religious exemptions allows for this cooperative relationship to continue in a way that ultimately best serves vulnerable people and communities, the organizations that serve them and the good of the nation.

Recommendation

- Support policies and legislation that allow faith-based organizations that serve people in need to do so in a manner consistent with their moral and ethical convictions and best practices.

Poverty and Racial Justice

CCUSA and its member agencies work to alleviate and reduce the growing inequality in our society and acknowledge there are critical ways for us to take concerted action, through direct service and policy changes, toward this goal. We strongly believe that any strategy to reduce poverty in America must address the relationship between income and racial inequity, particularly with respect to housing, lending, education, hunger and employment.

Recommendations

Stronger Laws to Punish Predatory Lenders

- Cap the interest rate that can be charged for short-term loans.
- Ensure greater transparency of the conditions of such loans through accessible language for those who might have limited education or English proficiency.

Policies in Education and Employment

- Support diversity in employment and education.
- Support remedial education and job training programs.

For more detail, please see CCUSA's publication [Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good](#).

Improved Fair Housing Laws

- Continue support for greater accountability and transparency in the mortgage industry (e.g., Community Reinvestment Act).
- Ensure equal access to the funding necessary to obtain housing financing.

Housing and Homelessness

We believe that housing (and access to housing) is a fundamental human right that recognizes the life and dignity of every person. CCUSA supports affordable housing policies across the country and provides emergency shelters and long-term assistance to vulnerable populations.

Recommendations

Access to Affordable Housing

- Increase federal support to build more affordable housing, including increased funding for emergency rental assistance, project-based and tenant-based housing and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and related programs.
- Expand other opportunities for people of color to purchase their own homes and include communities of color in federal mortgage guarantees.

Support Policies to Reduce Homelessness

- Support a coordinated entry system that allows service providers to identify, assess, refer and connect people in crisis to housing and assistance.
- Increase access to permanent supportive services, rapid rehousing and transitional housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Food and Nutrition

CCUSA member agencies operate specialized food programs to enhance food security among different segments of vulnerable groups, such as children during out-of-school time, when they are most likely to be food insecure. Agencies also maintain food banks, pantries or cupboards. Some also offer government bulk food distribution, mass food distribution events and other food programs such as food cooperatives, community-supported agriculture and food voucher services.

Recommendations

- Reauthorize the Farm Bill to build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food and farm system and strengthen key nutrition programs – particularly SNAP – without burdensome eligibility requirements.
- Simultaneously support access to healthy food and uphold existing processes for updating the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and school meal nutrition standards.
- Prioritize investments that support individuals and communities that historically have been and, in some cases, continue to be underserved by current federal food and farm policy. These investments include better access for military families and students.

- Eliminate the SNAP drug felony ban and transition Puerto Rico from a capped NAP block grant to full SNAP benefits.
- Support and expand government bulk food distribution programs, such as Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.
- Help underserved farmers and ranchers start new farm and food-related businesses to increase rural economic opportunity through programs such as the Local Agriculture Market Program to expand access to local fresh and nutritious food.
- Support adequate funding to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables through programs such as the Gus Schumaker Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNip) and the Senior Market Nutrition Incentive Programs.
- Increase FY24 funding levels for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and extend certification period, increase eligibility to 6-years-old and allow an additional snack for full-day care.
- Support Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation such as the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act. Ensure access to important nutrition programs for underserved communities, particularly persons of color and low-income individuals and families.

Economic Security

Poverty threatens the dignity of human life and the ability to meet basic needs for the stability of families and local communities. Catholic Charities agencies offer family income, asset development and other financial resources; foster healthy family connections, safety and stability; prevent and alleviate family crises; and protect vulnerable children and families.

Recommendations

- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage.
- Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act with robust funding for wraparound services that prepare and support those with no/low income and/or a skill deficit to enter employment and thrive; funding for programs supporting apprenticeship and entrepreneurship; and expansion of access to employment, education and services for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to make it available to all workers and families in need.
- Provide access to paid and medical family leave.
- Increase support for veterans and military families.
- Provide high-speed internet in rural communities.
- Support parent and student loan debt relief including canceling student loan debt.
- Ensure access to life-sustaining, affordable health care, including Medicaid and telehealth.

Expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC)

- Ensure that the CTC benefits the low-income households that need it the most by making it fully refundable without a minimum income threshold.
- Reject offsets for the CTC that would cut programs that serve persons in need.
- Make the CTC available for families for one year before the birth of a new child.
- Allow monthly payments.
- Continue to include citizen children of mixed-status families.
- Increase the maximum credit amount.

Support for Children and Youth

- Invest in education programs such as pre-K, Early Head Start and Head Start programs.
- Provide a child-focused, paid parental leave policy. Any increases in work requirements must be accompanied by corresponding childcare funding.
- Provide effective support to dislocated youth to ensure that all children who have been abused and neglected, including those in foster care, have the services and support they need to heal and thrive.
- Preserve and enhance quality health treatment and rehabilitation services to abused and neglected children and youth.
- Ensure stable and adequate funding for childcare subsidy programs so that all families in need have access to quality, affordable childcare.
- Invest in programs for low-income youth that keep them safe and off the streets, and provide them access to higher education, job training and services to help them reach their full potential.

Support for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

- Increase funding for senior programs and programs for persons with disabilities such as important preventive health services, home delivery of meals, transportation, Medicare, Medicaid and housing assistance.
- Increase support for Social Security Income and Social Security Disability income to be adjusted and indexed for inflation.
- Fund and support for caregiver programs that allow aging seniors to remain in their community.
- Invest in programs to assist seniors raising grandchildren (guardianship/kinship care).
- Protect the Senior Community Service Employment Program from elimination.

Climate Change

As a national network of Catholic social service providers, CCUSA and its agencies work in communities to bolster true sustainability by protecting our common home, the Earth, as well as safeguarding the well-being of low-income persons and families. Our network is directly involved in disaster recovery; when a community is impacted by a disaster, our agencies respond with staff, volunteers and humanitarian relief to bring aid and comfort.

Recommendations

- Support the creation of an independent National Disaster Safety Board that studies the underlying causes of disasters – which are frequently the result of climate change – as well as related fatalities and property damage nationwide. Such a board must prioritize disaster impacts on low-income communities.
- Continue to ensure that the National Flood Insurance Program remains accessible and affordable to low-income households that live in high-risk hazard areas.

Support for Disaster Relief

- Enact measures enumerated in the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act bill, introduced in the 117th Congress, and the Reforming Disaster Recovery Act of 2019, passed in the House in 2019.
- Provide appropriations for the Department of Agriculture’s Emergency Grants to Assist Low-Income Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (42 U.S.C. 5177a).
- Expand funding levels for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP).
- Provide additional funding for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and CDBG Disaster Recovery funds.

Immigration and Refugee Policy

For 114 years, the Catholic Charities community has advocated for just and fair policies that help people reach their full potential, including calling for comprehensive immigration reform in a manner that upholds human dignity. Recognizing the inherent dignity of every person, our agencies serve migrants along the border and throughout the country by providing basic human needs, such as food, shelter and clothing, as well as immigration legal assistance and social work case management, resettling refugees from all corners of the world and assisting essential workers with a range of services.

Recommendations

- Create new legal pathways for entry into the U.S. to reduce irregular migration, reunite families, staff struggling industries and boost the economy.
- Protect individuals who were brought to this country as children by continuing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy.

- Provide permanent legal status and a pathway to citizenship for essential workers, including frontline healthcare and agricultural workers, teachers and others who reside in this country under DACA, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) protection.
- Improve access to Employment Authorization Documents for all immigrants by adequately resourcing the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to enable the agency to shorten the processing time of Employment Authorization Documents (EAD) applications. Reducing the waiting period from 180 days to 30 days for EAD asylum applicants would also improve access.
- Provide adequate funding for refugee admissions and resettlement to at least the historical average of 95,000.
- Strengthen border security with policies that are proportional and just, ensuring that they are implemented in a humane and orderly manner and in coordination with state and local government, as well as faith-based and nonprofit service providers.
- Robustly fund alternatives to detention that are trauma-informed and provide immigrants with community-based support to enable them to comply with legal obligations.