

The Honorable «FullName»
United States «House»
Washington, DC «Zip»

January 16, 2004

Dear «TitleName»,

As the second session of the 108th Congress begins, many programs serving low-income families and children face an uncertain future even as the needs reported by shelters, food pantries, and other social service agencies continue to grow. The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd looks to you for leadership to ensure that the unmet needs of our country's most vulnerable populations are not neglected and that government resources and policies are put in the service of the common good of all people.

In 22 states throughout the country and in 68 countries worldwide, Good Shepherd Sisters, Associates, Lay Collaborators, and Volunteers work with women, families, and children in their daily struggles to meet basic human needs, to be educated, to find dignified work, and to live lives free of violence and exploitation. Drawing from the experiences of Good Shepherd programs and from Gospel values that ground the Good Shepherd mission of reconciliation and mercy, the National Advocacy Center maintains that the government has a responsibility to meet the basic needs of all its citizens and that public policy must be judged in light of its impact on people who are poor.

At a time when poverty is rising and three in ten households have housing affordability problems, when over 43 million Americans have no health insurance, and when only one in seven children eligible for child care receives it, we believe that improving and expanding assistance programs, such as Section 8, Medicaid, and the Workforce Investment Act, should be a top priority for Congress. The National Advocacy Center also supports legislative efforts to increase affordable housing production, to provide access to comprehensive health care for all Americans, and to provide equal access to care for those seeking treatment for mental health and substance abuse problems. In addition, we hope that Congress will continue its bipartisan work on immigration reform and pass the DREAM Act in its original form.

Of particular concern to us in the coming year are the unfinished reauthorizations of TANF/CCDBG and Head Start. We ask that you give careful consideration to the final agreements that are reached. Inadequate funding and proposals for greater state control threaten the critical services provided by both of these programs.

Specifically, the National Advocacy Center urges you to push for a TANF bill that rejects more restrictive work requirements and the "superwaiver", and includes at least a \$6 billion total increase in mandatory childcare funding, expanded opportunities for education and training, and restored benefits for lawfully present immigrants. From our work with youth and families, we know that unless adequate supports are available, the goal of self-sufficiency is difficult for many to reach.

In addition, the National Advocacy Center believes that Congress should work toward a Head Start reauthorization that maintains the program's commitment to high quality, comprehensive services. We are concerned by proposals to alter the federal-to-local partnership that has been critical to the program's success and to implement inappropriate outcome measures that are not scientifically well-grounded and would discourage grantees from serving the most at risk children. We urge you to oppose these efforts and hope that you will fight for a Head Start bill that maintains the integrity of the program and provides the additional resources necessary to provide high quality staffing and curricula and ensure that all eligible children are served.

Though the National Advocacy Center recognizes the budgetary challenges of the coming year, Catholic social teaching reminds us that, "the obligation to provide justice for all means that the poor have the single most urgent claim on the conscience of the nation (*Economic Justice for All*, #86). We look forward to working with you in the coming year to ensure that this responsibility is fulfilled.

Sincerely,

Sr. Gayle Lwanga Crumbley, RGS
National Coordinator

Alison L. Prevost
Lobbyist