

January 9, 2007

Dear Representative,

The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd would like to congratulate you on your election to the 110th Congress. We look forward to working with you and your staff in the coming year to ensure that our shared responsibility to the common good and to care for those in need is met. Please find attached a detailed articulation of our priorities for the coming year, which we are hopeful the new Congress will address. Of these, the minimum wage and the federal budget require immediate attention and *the National Advocacy Center urges you to take a strong stand for low-income families and individuals by supporting H.R. 2, The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, and working to ensure that needed additional funding is provided for critical social services in both the final FY2007 budget and the FY2008 budget resolution.*

Since the National Advocacy Center opened, we have been a strong proponent of increasing the federal minimum wage as a step toward insuring that all workers receive wages adequate to support themselves and their families with dignity. From our Sisters' and Agencies' work throughout the U.S., and in your district, we know the struggles of individuals and their families who are unable to support themselves by their own labor because of the inadequacy of the current minimum wage—\$5.15 an hour is simply not enough to meet the rising costs of health care, gasoline and housing that working poor families are facing. The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007 is a critical, though preliminary, step toward renewing our national commitment to overcoming poverty. In addition, the legislation will bring much needed protections to extremely vulnerable workers in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, where Good Shepherd Sisters are also working to assist victims of trafficking and labor exploitation. *The National Advocacy Center urges you to pass H.R. 2, without amendment, as quickly as possible.*

The National Advocacy is also deeply concerned about the current budget situation and has long advocated for more balanced budget priorities and greater social investment. We were extremely disappointed that the 109th Congress failed to complete the FY2007 appropriations bills and that the budget process against was characterized by forced cuts and systematic neglect of the needs of millions. *Although we understand the decision to pass a long term joint resolution to complete the FY2007 budget, we urge you to support additional funding, which is possible within the overall cap, for the wide range of social service programs that have been cut over the past several years.* FY2006 funding levels are inadequate to maintain even current service levels and such a funding freeze would represent a real threat to the security and vitality of families and communities.

In addition, *the National Advocacy Center hopes that in the FY2008 budget you will support efforts to restore and expand funding for job training, work supports, health care, housing, food assistance and environmental protection strengthen families and communities and promote opportunity for all.* We are aware and supportive of the newly reinstated PAY-GO rule, but believe that a reordering of budget priorities, including the reconsideration of some of the misguided tax policies of the past several years, can both yield sufficient down payments on these investments and help stem the growing inequality in our nation. Our participation in the international Good Shepherd community

also challenges us to view the budget from the perspective of our global interdependence—a perspective which makes us critical of the imbalance between military spending and investments in programs that build and sustain peace. *We recognize that there are legitimate security needs that must be met, but we believe that funding can be redirected to promote a broader vision of global human security.*

Part of the direction statement the 28th General Chapter of the Sisters of the good Shepherd reads, “Profoundly challenged by the suffering and distress in our world, we witness to the fact that another reality is possible for humanity and for the whole of creation.” With a new Congress and a country eager for change, a strong potential exists to make this new reality more concrete. We offer the above recommendations with this goal in mind and, again, look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Sr. Gayle Lwanga, RGS
National Coordinator

Alison L. Prevost
Lobbyist