

**ADVOCACY CENTER PRIORITIES AND NAC SIGN-ON'S
BY U.S. PROVINCE LEADERS: February 2021**
Prepared by Brigid Lawlor, RGS

COVID – 19 RELATED

NAC FOCUS AREA: POVERTY/FAMILIES

ISSUE: CANCEL FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN DEBT

General Content: Letter calling on the President of the United States to take Executive action to broadly cancel Federal student loan debt. The U.S. is facing historic public health and economic crises caused by the coronavirus (COVID– 19) pandemic that threatens the financial well-being of nearly every American family; the United States also faced a historic student loan crisis, which is currently holding back our struggling economy and restricting opportunity and prosperity for millions of American families. Student debt disproportionately impacts borrowers of color, who face the worst effects of the student debt. Both the House and the Senate have prepared bills for passage in support of the Executive Action.

Sent to: President Biden, Members of the House and Senate

Sponsored by: Center for Responsible Lending

ISSUE: AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

General Content: Letter urging quick action to enact no less than President Biden's American Rescue Plan. At the current pace, the nation will exceed 500,000 deaths from the coronavirus in the third week of February. Currently there is a race to vaccinate millions of people before variants of the disease can evade the vaccines now developed. There have been 45 consecutive weeks of new unemployment claims higher than the worst week of the Great Recession. Millions of Americans are going hungry. More than one-third of people reported they had serious difficulty paying regular household bills in the previous week. Additionally, Congress must prioritize the well-being of communities of color in the next COVID package to reduce shameful inequities laid bare by the pandemic.

Sent to: Members of the House and Senate

Sponsored by: Coalition on Human Need

- Also Racism focus

ISSUE: AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

General Content: As the American Rescue Plan advances through the House and the Senate, language removing the rebate cap must be retained, but congressional action to lower drug prices must not be limited to this measure. U.S. patients and taxpayers pay hundreds of billions of dollars to drug corporations every year. Despite this, even before the COVID-19 crisis, nearly three-in-

ten Americans reported rationing medicine due to cost. Helping curb the very worst price spikes is a good first step, but insufficient to provide the relief that we need.

Sent to: Headers of the House and Senate: Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Sponsored by: Public Citizen

ISSUE: INCLUDE: THE RAISE THE WAGE ACT OF 2021 IN THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN.

General Content: Letter urging the inclusion of The Raise the Wage Act of 2021 in the American Rescue Plan as a necessary part of our national recovery from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. If enacted, the Raise the Wage Act of 2021 would: • Gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025; • After 2025, adjust the minimum wage each year to keep pace with growth in the median wage — a measure of wages for typical workers; • Phase out the egregious subminimum wage for tipped workers, which has been frozen at a meager \$2.13 since 1991; and • Steadily terminate unacceptable subminimum wages for workers with disabilities employed in sheltered workshops and for workers under age 20.

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: Network

ISSUE: HEALTH CARE AFFORDABILITY ACT OF 2021

General Content: As the country continues to face the devastating health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, it is more important than ever to ensure that every American has affordable care. By increasing the size of and expanding eligibility for premium tax credits, the Health Care Affordability Act would reduce out-of-pocket costs for households across the United States, lower premiums for more than ten million people, and reduce the number of uninsured Americans by millions more.

Sent to: President Biden, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Sponsored by: Protect Our Care

ISSUE: PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT

General Content: **Paycheck Fairness Act** will soon be reintroduced. Substantively, it is similar to the one from the 116th Congress. However, it is reframed around the current crises. The new amendments include:

- Directing the Department of Labor to conduct research, outreach, and educational programs to eliminate pay disparities for women and girls of color (including in the teenage labor force).
- Clarifying that employers with fewer than 100 employees are exempted from having to report pay data to the EEOC.
- Clarifying that the protections from retaliation for discussing or disclosing pay apply to asking the employer why the wages of the employee are set at a certain rate or salary.

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: American Association of University Women (AAUW)

ISSUE: CDC EVICTION MORATORIUM

General Content: Letter urging the Biden Administration to extend, improve, and enforce the current CDC eviction moratorium until the end of the pandemic. The federal eviction moratorium has kept millions of people who otherwise would have been evicted stably housed but it has significant shortcomings that undermine its public health impacts. The moratorium must be extended beyond its current expiration on March 31 through the end of the pandemic, and be improved and enforced.

Sent to: President Biden, HUD Secretary-designate Fudge and CDC Director Walensky

Sponsored by: National Low Income Housing Association

ISSUE: ENFORCEMENT OF THE EVICTION MORATORIUM

General Content: Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission – asking them to use their existing authority to protect renters and homeowners. Right now, no federal agency is enforcing the moratorium, and we believe these agencies can do so, without any further action by Congress.

Sent to: David Uejio, Acting Director, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and Rebecca K. Slaughter, Acting Chair, Federal Trade Commission

Sponsored by: National Low Income Housing Coalition and National Consumer Law Center

NAC FOCUS AREA: RACISM

ISSUE: MEDICAID EXPANSION AND BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH

General Content: The COVID-19 pandemic is a moral challenge and our nation's response has already revealed our values. Black and brown communities have experienced devastation with disproportionately higher infection and mortality rates from COVID-19.

Therefore, urge Congress to address these injustices by supporting provisions in the COVID-19 relief package currently under consideration in the House of Representatives that pave the way for states to expand Medicaid access.

The current House package includes several vital provisions that make coverage more affordable and accessible for millions of low-income people and vulnerable communities through the Medicaid program

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: Network

NAC FOCUS AREA: OTHER RELATED CONCERNS

ISSUE: GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS

General Content: Letter to President Biden calling on him during this global health crisis to take every possible step to create a just and equitable policy toward the development, manufacture, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Sent to: President Biden

Sponsored by: Network

ISSUE: COVID-19 RELIEF FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE

General Content: To ensure that current and formerly incarcerated people are not invisible in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, we urge you to release as many people as possible from prisons. In the absence of such bold action we encourage the use of available mechanisms, including: immediate release of elderly and medically vulnerable people; early release of anyone within 18 months of their release date; and the wide use of compassionate release and home confinement.

To ensure that formerly incarcerated people are not disproportionately affected by the economic downturn that has come in the wake of this pandemic we urge Congress to: Amend the Small Business Administration payroll protection program (PPP) loan application to remove any exclusion of formerly incarcerated individuals. Specifically, we urge an immediate repeal of the Interim Final Rule unilaterally adopted by the SBA which effectively barred business owners with criminal records from applying for PPP loans. Explicitly include formerly incarcerated people in all economic relief programs.

Sent to: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives, The Honorable Charles Schumer Majority Leader, United States Senate and House and Senate Judiciary Committee Leadership.

Sponsored by: Friends Committee on National Legislation

NON COV-19

NAC FOCUS AREA: ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

ISSUE: TACKLING GLOBAL DEFORESTATION

General Content: Letter to the Biden-Harris Administration and Congress to combat illegal deforestation in the commodities supply chain contributing to forest degradation and deforestation, in addition to land conflicts, human rights violations, and environmental crimes. Deforestation is driving climate change and the emergence of viruses such as Ebola and the novel coronavirus.

Sent to: Biden-Harris Administration and Members of Congress

Sponsored by: Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NAC FOCUS AREA: IMMIGRATION

ISSUE: REQUEST TO DESIGNATE AND REDESIGNATE 18 COUNTRIES FOR TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS AND PROTECT 2.3 MILLION IMMIGRANTS

General Content: Letter to President Biden and DHS Secretary Mayorkas requesting that they designate and redesignate 18 countries for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), protecting upwards of 2.3 million people. The letter covers the following countries: *Bahamas, Cameroon, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Mauritania, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Venezuela, and Yemen.*

Syria was not included as it was recently redesignated. Mexico was not included as there is a Mexico-only letter.

Sent to: President Biden and DHS Secretary Mayorkas

Sponsored by: Masa Group

ISSUE: UNJUST DEPORTATION AND “EXPULSION” FLIGHTS TO HAITI AND OTHER COUNTRIES!

General Content: Letter to President Biden and DHS to Stop the Deportations express our deep concern about the targeted detention and deportation of Black migrants, and the expulsions of Haitians at the border under policies carried over from the previous administration, especially as we celebrate Black History Month. With every deportation and expulsion flight, we are placing lives at risk and abdicating from our moral and legal obligations to provide protection. We urge you to take immediate action to save Black migrants' lives by exercising your authority to halt deportation flights and stop expelling Haitians under Title 42.

Sent to: The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Sponsored by: Bridges Faith Initiative

- **Also Racism Focus**

ISSUE: MISUSE OF TITLE 42

General Content: Letter to President Biden to end the misuse of Title 42 public health authority at the border, stop blocking and expelling people seeking U.S. humanitarian protections, ensure appropriate infrastructure and support for shelters and other border groups to assist asylum seekers, and allow these families, children and adults to pursue their requests while in safety, inside the United States. Since March 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has blocked and turned away people at the southern border, including asylum seekers and children, without access to the U.S. asylum system or preliminary protection screenings, sending them to persecution, torture and other serious danger in violation of U.S. refugee and anti-trafficking laws and treaty obligations.

Sent to: President Biden

Sponsored by: Human Rights First

NAC FOCUS AREA: POVERTY/FAMILIES

ISSUE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

General Content: Letter urges Congress to provide the highest possible funding for HUD and USDA affordable housing and community development programs for fiscal year 2022.

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: National Low Income Housing Coalition

ISSUE: PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT

General Content: The need to ensure pregnant workers can stay healthy and working is long overdue. Pregnant workers continue to face significant health consequences if they are forced to keep working without accommodations and significant economic hardship if they are fired or pushed out for needing accommodations. (Previously submitted in 2020; resubmitted in 2021).

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: A Better Balance: The Work & Family Legal Center

ISSUE: RAISE THE WAGE ACT Off 2021

General Content: If enacted, the Raise the Wage Act of 2021 would: Gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025; *After 2025*, adjust the minimum wage each year to keep pace with growth in the median wage—a measure of wages for typical workers; Phase out the egregious subminimum wage for tipped workers, which has been frozen at a meager \$2.13 since 1991; and Sunset unacceptable subminimum wages for workers with disabilities employed in sheltered workshops and for workers under age 20.

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: National Employment Law Project

NAC FOCUS AREA: RACISM

ISSUE: AMENDMENTS TO CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

General Content: The system of mass incarceration working as intended; it is a racist system. Comprehensive reform that does not exclude violent offenses or discriminate against people because of the offense committed is needed. Extending the negative impacts through policy that excludes violent offenses only reinforces further harms and impedes rehabilitation. The criminal legal system should be reformed. Addressing violent offenses is a necessary step in this process of reform.

Congress should enact reforms that meaningfully reduce incarceration:

- Pass the Second Look Act to offer the opportunity at a shorter sentence via judicial review;

- Amend the FIRST STEP Act to eliminate the exclusions for earned time credits and from programming participation;
- Remove carve-outs for violent or drug offenses or any policies that discriminate against returning citizens from all relevant bills, including social security legislation and FAFSA restructuring.

Sent to: Members of Congress

Sponsored by: Friends Committee on National Legislation

NAC FOCUS AREA: U.S. POLICIES THAT AFFECTS GOOD SHEPHERD MISSION IN OTHER COUNTRIES

ISSUE: JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION (JCPOA), ALSO KNOWN AS THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

General Content: Letter to President Biden by a Coalition of Catholic Justice Organizations urging him to lift sanctions on Iran, save the JCPOA, and build on it to negotiate further steps toward lasting peace.

Sent to: President Biden

Sponsored by: Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, PAX Christi International

ISSUE: ENHANCING NORTH KOREA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE ACT

General Content: This is a House Bill in process. It has been proposed in order to expedite the provision of humanitarian assistance, including life-saving medical care, to the people of North Korea, and for other purposes.

Sent to: House of Representatives

Sponsored by: American Friends Service Committee

NAC FOCUS AREA: VIOLENCE

ISSUE: JUSTICE IN POLICING ACT OF 2020

General Content: This bill addresses a wide range of policies and issues regarding policing practices and law enforcement accountability. It includes measures to increase accountability for law enforcement misconduct, to enhance transparency and data collection, and to eliminate discriminatory policing practices.

The bill facilitates federal enforcement of constitutional violations (e.g., excessive use of force) by state and local law enforcement. Among other things, it does the following:

- lowers the criminal intent standard—from willful to knowing or reckless—to convict a law enforcement officer for misconduct in a federal prosecution,
- limits qualified immunity as a defense to liability in a private civil action against a law enforcement officer or state correctional officer, and

- authorizes the Department of Justice to issue subpoenas in investigations of police departments for a pattern or practice of discrimination.

The bill also creates a national registry—the National Police Misconduct Registry—to compile data on complaints and records of police misconduct.

It establishes a framework to prohibit racial profiling. The bill is being reintroduced in 2021.

Sent to: Members of the House of Representatives

Sponsored by: House Democratic Caucus

NAC FOCUS AREA: OTHER RELATED CONCERNS

ISSUE: For the People Act (HR 1)

General Content: For the People Act (HR 1) is a bold, comprehensive bill that would increase the accessibility and transparency of our democracy by bolstering the power of voters, limiting the influence of big money, and curbing unethical practices of elected leaders.

Sent to: Members of the House

Sponsored by: NETWORK

STATEMENTS

Joint Statements: Congregational and/National/Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd:

STATEMENT ON THE MYANMAR'S NASCENT DEMOCRACY AND THE MILITARY COUP

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in the USA and Canada, the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office condemn the illegitimate takeover of the Government of Myanmar and support the voice of the people, including those of our Good Shepherd Sisters in Myanmar.

Joint Statements with other Advocacy Organizations:

REPEAL ICC (INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT) SANCTIONS

The statement urges the Biden Administration to engage constructively with the ICC and rescind the sanctions targeting the Court. We joined to signers in order to demonstrate concern over the sanctions, and commend the Biden Administration's commitment to respecting the rule of law and pursuing multilateral cooperation in support of U.S. interests. . . We call upon the U.S. government to rescind Executive Order 13928 and the sanctions designations based upon it at the earliest possible opportunity. We appeal for constructive engagement with the ICC and we urge the Biden administration and members of Congress to support that approach.

Signed on after consultation with Sr. Winifred Doherty, Congregational Justice and Peace Office
Sponsored by: The Washington Working Group on the International Criminal Court