



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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May 20, 2008

Hon. John M. Spratt
Chairman
House Budget Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Spratt:

On behalf of the Coalition on Human Needs, I wish to express support for the priorities set forth in the conference agreement for the concurrent Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Resolution. The Coalition on Human Needs is a national alliance including religious, labor, civil rights, service provider, policy, and advocacy organizations concerned with the needs of low-income and vulnerable people. We certainly urge Members of Congress to vote for the Budget Resolution because it allows for some much needed progress in responding to growing need.

The conference agreement is clear in rejecting cuts proposed by the President in vital services for families and communities including housing, health care, nutrition, education and employment. Funding for domestic discretionary programs exceeds the President's budget by more than \$20 billion. The conference agreement takes the necessary further step of providing funds to allow more help than now available to meet urgent needs.

The Budget Resolution agreement recognizes that prices for food staples such as bread, eggs, and milk are skyrocketing, and provides more funding for the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program (WIC). The agreement similarly notes the hardships inflicted on families and the elderly by steeply rising home energy prices, and explicitly provides for the full authorized level of \$5.1 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Our members are reporting deepening poverty and hardship among the families they serve – parents desperate for work who have exhausted their unemployment benefits, families falling behind in rent and losing health insurance, whose utilities are being shut off, and who wait in long lines at food banks with increasingly empty shelves. The budget agreement offers them some hope. First, it sets aside an additional \$5.0 billion for spending in the current fiscal year to meet emergency needs beyond the partial response in the supplemental spending bill now before Congress. Second, it allows for real improvements in unemployment insurance, the refundable Child Tax Credit, and child support enforcement – all three important ways of increasing and stabilizing family

income. Third, it accommodates increased funding for tenant-based Section 8 rental assistance, for addressing the shortfall in project-based Section 8 funding, and for housing for the elderly. Fourth, it provides more funding for Head Start, K-12 education for low-income children and for students with disabilities, and includes deficit neutral reserve funds towards funding more child care and for making college more affordable.

The budget agreement repeats last year's inclusion of a reserve intended to protect children currently covered by the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and to serve more of those eligible. We join with thousands of organizations and millions of families who commend you for continuing to seek progress for SCHIP and urge speedy action to achieve this goal. We also support protection of Medicaid services and increased funding for community health centers and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, as specifically noted in the conference agreement language.

These are among the many services highlighted in the budget conference agreement that address the needs of low-income people. In addition, the agreement provides reserves to allow for expansion of supplemental grants to states for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), for child welfare services, and for reauthorizing Trade Adjustment Assistance.

In light of the many years of cuts to urgently needed services and need deepened by the recession, the increase in domestic appropriations provided in the budget agreement is modest. We appreciate your efforts to maximize services for low-income people throughout the budget, and strongly believe that funding these priorities will provide both a short-term boost and long-term investment in our economic recovery. Because these are such important investments, we support the commitment to paying for tax cuts expressed in the budget agreement, to avoid unaffordable losses in revenue.

We urge Congress to adopt the FY 2009 Budget Resolution conference agreement, and look forward to working with you to carry forward the human needs priorities contained within it in the coming months.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Weinstein", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deborah Weinstein
Executive Director