



# COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

## Writing an Op-Ed about Sequestration and Congress's Budget and Appropriations Bills

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Op-Eds placed around the country by community leaders, faith leaders, heads of service agencies, elected officials, service recipients and others will heighten awareness of the devastation continued cuts to human needs programs, as called for in Congress's budget and appropriations bills, will bring to your community. It will also send a message to Congress that we are watching, and that there is another path they should take.

Below are a suggested outline and sample Op-Ed. Think about how you can connect news stories to Congress' decision to keep harmful sequestration cuts in place and slash essential human needs programs even further in future years. Use your own words to increase your chance of publication. Include examples that are personal to you, the issues you work on, and your community. It is helpful to put a face to the numbers; incorporating stories that make the data come to life will increase the impact. How have you or someone you know benefited from the programs that would be cut under sequestration?

Many papers limit Op-Ed submissions to [400-800](#) words. Check with the paper you plan to submit your op-ed to for its specific requirements.

### Think about including these pieces in your Op-Ed:

- Include information about your role and stories from your community or your organization to make this personal and put faces to these statistics.
- Give an overview of what's going on in Congress: Budget resolutions have passed that include cuts that will bring spending on domestic programs to new lows; work on annual spending bills continues, adhering to those cuts; President Obama has threatened to veto bills that include the too-tight sequestration caps.
- Describe the proposed cuts to human needs programs included in Congress's budget and spending bills. Focus on one or a few specific programs that will be cut. Include information on how valuable these programs are, and how sequestration cuts threaten them. For example, if cuts go through, XX people in your state will lose housing, Head Start, etc. Use resources from the White House ([here](#) and [here](#)) and the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) for state data. Mention [past cuts](#) to that program as well, and consider using these program-specific [talking points](#) from the Coalition on Human Needs. State data has not been compiled for every program, but if you have any state or local information, include it.
- Offer a solution. It's not too late for Congress to change course, end sequestration, increase funding to the programs, and help vulnerable people in your community. In some states where

the climate is right, show support for the President's budget and his vow to veto bad appropriations bills.

- Preempt any anticipated counter-attacks, like that our country can't afford it. Note examples of increased Pentagon spending and tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy as evidence that we can afford a different route. Note evidence that corporate tax cuts don't lead to job creation.
- Make the case for added revenue. Everyone should pay their fair share so we can help those who truly need it.

For **additional talking points you can use**, see CHN's [tip sheet](#) on writing a Letter to the Editor and other resources on our [FY2016 Budget resource page](#). CHN is happy to assist in proofing submissions and offering additional assistance. Please contact CHN's Senior Policy Writer Lecia Imbery at [limbery@chn.org](mailto:limbery@chn.org). Please also send a copy of your final submission to Lecia and let her know if your submission is accepted.

### **Sample Op-Ed:**

As the head of the Community Development Corporation in Richmond, I see the effects of cuts to housing programs on our low-income neighbors every day. From children growing up in shelters to families living on the streets, I know we must do better. That's why I'm even more disheartened that Congress intends on cutting funding for housing programs even further.

Congress is in the midst of passing annual spending bills that will have dramatic consequences in the everyday lives of Virginians and Americans all across the country. Unfortunately, it's making the wrong choices at the expense of these same hardworking people. Unless Congress changes course, millions more Americans will be driven into poverty or made more deeply poor.

The budget resolution recently passed by Congress, which sets caps for the spending bills now being debated, would cut spending by \$5 trillion over 10 years, slashing funds for education, transportation, housing, health care, SNAP/food stamps and other vital human needs programs. The plan not only keeps oppressive spending caps, known as sequestration, in place for the next fiscal year, it cuts these programs by billions below sequestration levels in the years following. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [63 percent](#) of its non-defense cuts come from programs serving low- and moderate-income people. Since FY2010, 136 important education, housing, job training, and many other programs serving low-income people have been cut, 50 of them by more than 15 percent and 39 by more than a third.

The spending bills now being debated are following the caps set by this budget, which will mean drastic cuts to programs Virginians need to survive. If the House has its way, [580](#) Virginia families who received housing vouchers in 2015 will be cut off in 2016. This is on top of 67,000 vouchers previously lost nationwide due to sequestration. The House would also cut funding for Homeless Assistance Grants that help homeless and at-risk families. Last year, there were 7,000 homeless people in Virginia, but only half

that number of housing beds. In addition, more than 700 Virginia children would lose access to Head Start, and more than 57,000 Virginians would lose job training and employment services to help them find good jobs and improve their skills. These cuts are bad for Virginians, bad for America and bad for our economy.

Real people are being hurt. [insert information about how the author sees this in his/her community – waiting lists for vouchers, a story of someone in need of who was turned away, or a success story of someone who received a voucher]

Thankfully, it's not too late for Congress to change course. The spending bills aren't law yet; there's still time to restore funding to vital programs so that they can help the most vulnerable in our community. The President's budget, for example, rejected the sequestration cuts and added billions for these programs. Congress should do the same. If Congress refuses, the President should stand behind his promise to veto the disastrous spending bills they're currently proposing.

To be sure, there are those in Congress who say we can't afford these programs; that we need to cut spending and be 'responsible.' But this is the same Congress who recently voted to give [\\$269 billion](#) in tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires and [\\$317 billion](#) in tax breaks to corporations. And it's the same Congress who is selectively busting through its own caps, using a fund that was intended for war funding to give \$90 billion more to the Pentagon for non-war-related activities. There are those who say these tax cuts will spur the economy and add jobs, but new [research](#) shows that tax cuts for lower-and middle-income folks are more effective at spurring economic growth than cuts for the wealthy. Those who can afford to pay their fair share should do so. Ending even some tax breaks and reducing Pentagon spending would reduce homelessness and poverty and fund things like education. It's clearly not that we can't afford programs that serve low-income Virginians, it's that we're choosing not to. We are clearly not being responsible to our neighbors who have the least.

More than 45 million Americans, and more than XX Virginians, live in poverty in the U.S. – the richest nation on Earth. At a time when too many Virginians are struggling, we need more investment, not less, in programs that keep people out of poverty and give our neighbors an opportunity to move ahead. Only this will grow our middle class, strengthen our foundation and our economy, and ensure shared prosperity. Congress needs to change course and make these investments for the future of Virginians and our country.