

INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

September 8, 2004

The Honorable John F. Kerry
John Kerry for President, Inc.
P.O. Box 77247
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Senator Kerry:

As representatives of communities of faith, we are deeply troubled by the recent Census Bureau report that details the increasing number of people in poverty and the increasing number of people without health insurance. Our nation is also being destabilized by the growing gap between those with extreme wealth and those living in deep poverty.

In 2003, an additional 1.3 million people fell below the poverty line, and 733,000 were children. The poverty line for a family of three, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, is \$14,680 (\$18,810 for a family of four). Currently, 17.6 percent of children in the United States – nearly one in five - are living in poverty. The new data show 35.9 million people living in poverty, with 43 percent (15.3 million) living in deep poverty, meaning they have cash incomes below half of the poverty line. This is the highest percentage on record. As a nation, we are moving backward and losing the positive gains we have recently made toward poverty reduction.

The new Census Bureau data also shows that an additional 1.4 million people entered the ranks of the uninsured, resulting in a record number, 45 million, now uninsured. Because of increased participation in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the proportion of children without health insurance coverage has remained constant at 11.4 percent. Were it not for those public programs, levels of uninsured children would have increased, as employer-based health care coverage declined in 2003.

As you continue your campaign for President, we urge you to speak out for the needs of those in poverty and those without health insurance. (We are also sending this letter and these questions to President Bush.) We urge you to answer these questions – to us and to the public:

How will you reduce poverty, and specifically child poverty, in the next four years?

What will you do to reduce the number of people who lack health insurance in the next four years?

How will you address the inability of the nation's health care system to provide affordable, quality health care to all?

Will you commit to a specific goal to cut poverty in half by 2010?

Will you commit to a goal to increase the number of people who are insured (i.e. "In the next four years, due to my policies, xx million more people will be covered by health insurance.")?

As communities of faith, we will continue to provide what services we can to reduce the impact of poverty on vulnerable populations, and to advocate for just policies that will lift all persons out of poverty. However, we are deeply concerned that the current economy is not working well for all people and that the opportunity for excellent health care is not accessible for many. We believe that our society and economy need to be strengthened

by providing greater equality of opportunity, just reward for hard work, quality health care for all, and a vision of working together for the common good.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns and thank you in advance for your responses to our attached questions. Please send your responses to our questions to Carolynn Race, Chair, Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs, c/o Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office, 110 Maryland Avenue, NE, Suite 104, Washington, DC 20002.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

American Baptist Churches USA
Call to Renewal
The Central Conference of American Rabbis
Christians for Justice Action (United Church of Christ)
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Church Women United
Disciples Advocacy Washington Network
Disciples Justice Action Network
The Episcopal Church, USA
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Lutheran Services in America
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
Women of Reform Judaism

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Poverty and Health Care Questionnaire

September 8, 2004

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