



The Honorable Patty Murray, Chairwoman
Senate Budget Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Paul Ryan, Chairman
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeff Sessions, Ranking Member
Senate Budget Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen, Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

November 7, 2013

To Members of the Budget Conference Committee:

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) seeks to improve the lives of low-income people. We develop and advocate for federal, state, and local policies to strengthen families and create pathways to education and work.

As you and your fellow conferees begin important discussions about the federal budget, we respectfully ask that you focus attention on the needs of low-income children, families, and individuals and ensure that budget decisions do not harm support programs critical to their success.

The protracted recovery from the Great Recession has not yet reached millions of poor and low-income people. CLASP offers the following recommendations to support these Americans on a path to economic security:

End sequestration cuts that have slowed economic growth, deprived children of needed child care and Head Start programs, reduced access to job training for low-income youth and adults, and squeezed state and local budgets—among many other impacts. While some agencies have been able to use carry-over funds to minimize the harmful effects of the sequester in 2013, these funds have run out, and the 2014 cuts will be even more painful. We call on Congress not to replace sequestration cuts with other harmful cuts, but to repeal sequestration and multi-year appropriations caps. If this does not happen, but savings or revenues are found to partially offset sequestration, at least half of such funds should be provided to non-defense discretionary programs. It is critical that Congress not simply replace defense sequestration cuts with cuts to non-defense programs, whether discretionary or entitlements.

Defend core programs for those most at risk in this economy, such as impoverished women and children or the long-term unemployed. With more than one in seven U.S. households experiencing food insecurity, the deep cuts proposed for SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) are unconscionable. Any budget agreement must protect programs that provide essential services for low- and moderate-income families, including child care, early education, infant nutrition, housing, and job training. In addition, Congress should reject damaging structural changes in essential programs. Examples of such changes include block-granting Medicaid or limiting Medicare by converting its benefits to fixed vouchers.

Support targeted new investments in early education, including universal pre-kindergarten for low-income children, Early Head Start-child care partnerships, and voluntary home visiting programs. High-quality early childhood programs from birth to age five are critical to put low-income infants, toddlers, and preschoolers on a path toward healthy cognitive and emotional development and success in adulthood. But far too many children can't access these supports.

Support job creation and economic growth and assist long-term unemployed workers and youth struggling to find work in a difficult job market. Federal unemployment insurance benefits should be extended, so that 1.3 million unemployed workers do not abruptly lose this critical income support at the end of 2013.

Support deficit reduction plans that include additional revenues drawn from equitable sources. Most of the deficit reduction to date has come from spending cuts. Entitlement changes that would affect beneficiaries should only be considered in the context of a comprehensive package that includes new progressive sources of revenue. Tax reform should include contributions to alleviating the long-term budget deficit.

Thank you for your consideration.

Olivia Golden
Executive Director