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Recommendations for the COVID-19 Stimulus Package

Bread for the World commends Congress for its bipartisan passage of H.R. 6201, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Meanwhile, we remain concerned about the continuing impact of COVID-19 on all Americans – especially the most vulnerable people who will be hit hardest. In addition, we are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on people living in developing countries. We call on Congress to consider their needs in future legislation.

We are pushing for action in a few key areas that reflect Bread for the World's policy priorities.

Examining the probable impact of the pandemic on vulnerable populations in the United States, it's clear that private individuals and organizations cannot mobilize the resources that the U.S. government can to support the 1 in 8 Americans who live at risk of hunger. In fact, federal nutrition programs provide roughly 10 times as much food assistance as private churches and charities. Therefore, Bread urges that future legislation:

- Boost SNAP maximum benefits by 15%
- Temporarily increase the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30
- Provide states temporary flexibility to suspend SNAP administrative rules that weaken their response to the crisis including work requirements and categorical illegibility
- Fully fund and support the Pandemic Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (P-SNAP) and Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP).
- Replace the Thrifty Food Plan with the Low Cost Food Plan.
- Expand the USDA Online SNAP purchasing pilot to all states and territories
- Support targeted enrollment for populations with many eligible individuals but low SNAP participation rates, including seniors and veterans. Allow meal delivery services and food pick-up programs to serve these populations.
- Support the expansion of job opportunities at food banks and meal delivery services to meet the expected significant increases in need due to mass unemployment.

Bread also encourages Congress to go beyond food assistance to provide supports that enable families to be self-reliant during this time. Bread urges that future legislation:

- Provide immediate cash assistance to low- and middle-income households, who will spend the money supporting the local and national economies rather than saving it.
- Boost services for homeless individuals and families.
- Provide targeted rental assistance through both the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), with a focus on rural communities.

- Strengthen unemployment insurance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we also protect people who are at high risk because they are detained in immigration facilities and federal prisons. Working in coalition with Bread members, our partners, and other grassroots leaders, Bread urges that future legislation:

- Ensure free access to medical tests and health care for all community members, including those in prison.
- Repeal all current restrictions that prevent formerly incarcerated people and/or their family members from fully participating in safety net programs.
- Protect detained immigrants from COVID-19 by releasing them to return to their families in the United States.
- Ensure that incarcerated individuals have access to proper hygiene products and free calls to lawyers, friends, and family members until their release.
- Suspend Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol enforcement activities, including deportations.

Although the pandemic has not yet reached every part of the developing world, we know that within the next month or so, it will affect people everywhere. Therefore, we ask that Congress, in future legislation, continue to provide prompt support to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State. Bread urges Congress to consider the following actions:

- Provide continued flexible funding to USAID and authorize its use for COVID-19 prevention and treatment efforts; and to global health security efforts, including support for health systems, critical health infrastructure, and rapid response efforts. Provide the economic support that will be needed to enable countries to cope with vastly diminished income from trade and other severe damage to their economies.
- Provide flexible funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to expand the effectiveness and reach of P.L. 480 and McGovern-Dole food programs so that the U.S. government is able to provide key food assistance to those impacted by the pandemic.
- Provide continued flexible operations funding for USAID and the Department of State to ensure the safety of their staff and programs.
- Ensure that USAID and the Department of State are authorized to transfer funds between accounts to most effectively respond to the unfolding pandemic. Extend the 6-month authority for fiscal year 2020 appropriations to ensure that the agencies are able to invest the resources wisely in this time of disruption.
- Provide flexible funding to support global efforts to respond, through the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the World Food Program (WFP), and UNICEF, to COVID-19 and its anticipated devastating impacts on both the economies of developing countries and on global food security and nutrition.

In the Bible, a plague is often seen as a call to prayer and repentance. God promises to 'heal the land' that asks for help and helps people in need (2 Chronicles 7:14). We

therefore urge policymakers to take quick action. We join the world in praying for all those affected and for a swift end to this global pandemic.