



Jesuit® Conference

Office of Justice and Ecology

POLICY PRIORITIES

2023-24



The inviolable dignity of every human being lies at the foundation of our Catholic faith. We share a vision of a society in which all people — of every race, color and creed — have the opportunity to flourish through access to quality education and health care, safe communities, good jobs, a safety net for times of hardship and a healthy environment.

During the pandemic, Congress and the Administration made significant strides toward these goals. For example, the one-year-only expansion of the Child Tax Credit extended economic support to low-income families, including those most in need. The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act will provide unprecedented funding to combat climate change.

The 118th Congress, despite being divided, has an opportunity to build on this momentum in 2023. As the country continues to transition out of the pandemic, we call on Congress and the Administration to work together for the common good, standing in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters, especially those who are most vulnerable.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

With a quarter of the world's incarcerated population, significant obstacles to reentry for those released from prison, and an overdependence on police to make up for a lack of mental health and social services, our criminal justice system requires significant reform. We need new approaches to community safety and criminal accountability that address the root causes of crime and promote healing and rehabilitation.

POLICY SUCCESS:

- The Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act, passed in the final days of the 117th Congress, will provide grants to police departments to implement crisis intervention strategies and train them in making community-based referrals when encountering people experiencing mental or substance-use crises. Congress can build on this success by:
 - **Passing the EQUAL Act, which eliminates the unjustifiable sentencing disparities between crack cocaine and powder cocaine** that have contributed to the disproportionate overincarceration of Black Americans.
 - **Eliminating the ban on accessing food assistance for those with felony drug convictions**, which will reduce recidivism and improve the financial stability of millions of returning citizens.



Fr. Zach Presutti, SJ (left) prays with an incarcerated man as part of the Thrive for Life Prison Project.

ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

After years of political paralysis and minimal action on the issue of climate change, the U.S. has begun to take responsibility for our shared role in slowing the effects of climate change and protecting our common home.

POLICY SUCCESS:

- In February 2021, the United States became a party to the Paris Agreement, recommitting to the global framework for climate action.
- In July 2022, Congress approved the biggest bill to combat climate change in its history, providing unprecedented support for a clean energy transition.

As Pope Francis reminds us in *Fratelli Tutti*, the Global South and marginalized communities suffer the worst consequences of our disregard for the planet. U.S. efforts to combat climate change should remedy the historical disinvestment in marginalized communities. Congress can do this by:

- **Passing the Environmental Justice for All Act** and other policies that protect and empower the communities that historically have been most impacted by ecological harms.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The government's economic response to the pandemic offered financial support to American families and communities, in many cases helping to prevent what could have been devastating spikes in hunger, homelessness, poverty and unemployment.

POLICY SUCCESS:

- Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which provided substantial financial support to combat the effects of the pandemic. Much of it focused on low-income families and communities.

One of the most successful provisions of the of ARPA was the expansion of the Child Tax Credit and its monthly distribution, which lifted millions of children out of poverty. Unfortunately, the temporary expansion has ended, returning many American families to financial insecurity. Congress and the Administration should provide millions of American households the opportunity to flourish again by:

- **Restoring the expansion of the Child Tax Credit** and ensuring that the poorest families receive the most help.
- **Defending the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, the country's most important anti-hunger program, against funding cuts.

Staff at the Pope Francis Center give meals to homeless and food insecure people in Detroit, Michigan.



MIGRATION

Migrants and refugees make communities stronger through their courage, ideas, hard work, resilience and traditions. Our laws should welcome migrants, honoring their dignity and desire to build safer, more stable lives. At the same time, we must address the root causes of migration so that people have the opportunity to build safe and secure livelihoods in their native countries. In particular, Congress and the Administration should:

- **Restore full access to asylum** by rescinding the many recently established barriers to asylum and building a system that makes asylum protections available to all those in need.
- **Protect migrants at the border from abuse during encounters with Border Patrol**, by ending, e.g., the practice of dangerous nighttime expulsions to Mexico and unwarranted confiscation of migrants' possessions.
- **Address the root causes of migration which lead people to leave their home countries**, including violence, corruption, economic insecurity and environmental degradation.
- **Enact comprehensive and humane immigration reform**, including a pathway to citizenship for DACA and TPS recipients, and safeguarding the family reunification immigration model.

NATIVE AMERICAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

For much of U.S. history, the government aimed to assimilate Indigenous peoples into white American culture through boarding schools where students were prohibited from speaking their native language or practicing their culture. Many of these boarding schools were run by Catholic religious orders, including the Jesuits.

In 2022 Senate and House committees held hearings on the bipartisan Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. The 118th Congress should:

- **Acknowledge the trauma caused by these institutions** and begin the long process that leads to healing by passing the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.



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The Office of Justice and Ecology advocates on behalf of the Society of Jesus in its mission of reconciliation with God, humanity, and creation. Focusing on U.S. federal policy, we collaborate with other Jesuit ministries throughout the country and abroad, including the Ignatian Solidarity Network, Jesuit Refugee Service USA and many other partners.