

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 21, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We greatly appreciate this Administration's commitment to achieving our shared goals of eliminating poverty, growing the economy, and creating millions of new jobs for our most vulnerable and low income Americans. The July 24, 2014 presentation by Roy Austin, Director of your Office of Urban Affairs, Justice and Opportunity sparked a lively discussion and highlighted how concerned Members of Congress can partner with your administration to improve the lives of hardworking people reaching for the middle class.

To further our shared objectives, we believe that this Administration should consider a series of strategic agency directives, in the absence of coordinated legislative action by Congress to address poverty in America. These measures, which impact the root causes of poverty, could make a major impact on the lives of millions of Americans.

Agency Coordination:

- Implement a Federal Interagency Working Group on Reducing Poverty, which would develop a National Strategy for reducing the number of persons living in poverty in America in half within 10 years, similar to H.R. 2182, the Half in Ten Act of 2013.

Criminal Justice and Re-entry:

- Encourage states to remove the ban on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program access for individuals with felony convictions.
- Conduct a review of "Ban the Box" policies enacted by state and local governments that could inform potential federal hiring policy changes for federal employees and contractors.
- Encourage states to adopt laws to expunge from criminal records certain drug and otherwise low-level offenses to help infrequent, non-violent offenders gain employment.

- Encourage states to adopt laws to ensure certain non-violent juvenile offenses do not carry over to adult records and harm employment opportunities.
- Encourage states and localities to develop guidelines to discourage overcharging without evidence upon arrest. Encourage states to indicate only convictions on criminal records, and not charges.

Education and Youth Development

- Convene key youth development organizations such as Youth Build, National Guard Youth Challenge, and expand Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (JCCC).
- Initiate a Presidential initiative to promote GED completion across the nation. Make learning at all ages a priority and target key areas with low literacy rates, emphasizing parental literacy programs.
- Develop an interdepartmental approach to address the literacy challenges that disrupt educational opportunity, creating a pattern of "transient" students. Identify schools in each community where transiency and poor attendance hinder student achievement. (GAO and NAACP have both done national studies on this challenge).

Housing and Financial Services

- Urge the Federal Housing Finance Agency to reinstate funding for the National Housing Trust Fund and the Capital Magnet Fund from fees paid by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.
- Urge the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to study the impact of increased alternative data reporting – the use of utility and telecom bills in consumer credit reporting – on the availability and affordability of credit for consumers with limited credit histories.
- Enhance Community Development Credit Unions' technical assistance and consumer counseling, and the revolving loan fund to encourage local capital accumulation and reliable sources of credit to counter the exit of insured financial institutions and proliferation of pay day lenders in low income communities.

Hunger and Food Security

- Convene a White House Conference on Food and Nutrition that would bring together experts in food, health, nutrition, and economic security to develop a plan not only to end hunger once and for all in the United States, but also require that proper nutrition be taken into account in such a plan.
- Transform segments of federal agricultural production and nutrition programs to more broadly engage and benefit the recipients and the communities in which they reside through encouragement of local, community based food production, processing, and sales, including through placing EBT redemption machines at approved local neighborhood production sites.

- Promote urban agriculture by better focusing the broad range of USDA technical assistance, production, marketing, and business development programs to advance the capacity of local nongovernmental organizations undertaking in-city food production of local, healthy foods.

Jobs and Employment

- Target resources across federal departments including National Resources Conservation Service (USDA), U.S. Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Guard to engage people seeking work to restore environmental quality in dilapidated neighborhoods through urban forestry, park improvement, local neighborhood flood mitigation, and blighted building work. Focus Youth Build in these targeted neighborhoods to transfer building skills to trades-short local residents.

We appreciate and encourage your consideration of these proposals, and look forward to working with you on these issues towards our shared goal of alleviating poverty and inequality for all Americans. Please do not hesitate to contact Colin Foard in Rep. Lee's office with any questions at colin.foard@mail.house.gov.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress



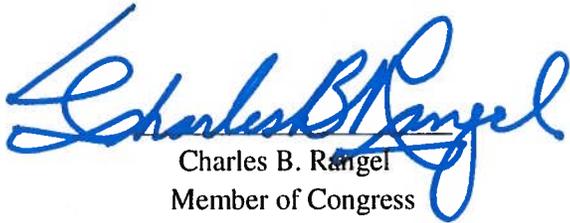
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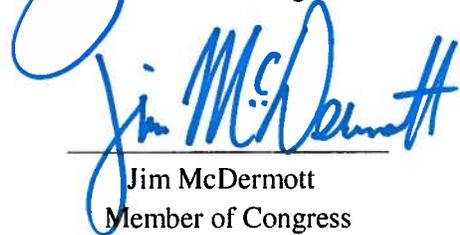

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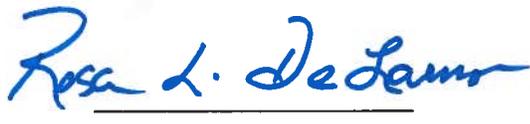

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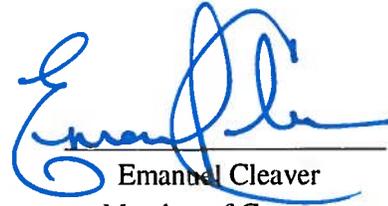

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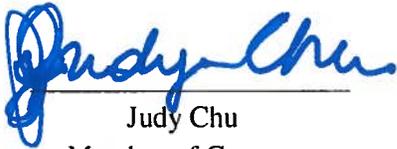
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cc:

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