



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6502

November 18, 2015

Hon. Paul D. Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

On behalf of the Democratic Whip's Task Force on Poverty, Income Inequality, and Opportunity, we are writing to ask that you commit to working with us to address the crisis of poverty and inequality in America in a way that is serious and far-reaching. We are encouraged by statements you have made in the past in which you, unlike many in your party, acknowledge the challenge that poverty presents and the important role that the federal government must play in answering it. However, we have concerns that many of your proposals, including the budget proposals you have put forward, take our nation in the wrong direction.

On April 30, 2014, as Chairman of the Budget Committee, you convened a hearing on the fiftieth anniversary of the War on Poverty, at which you said: 'The question isn't whether the federal government should help [fight poverty]. The question is how.' During your tenure as Chairman of the Budget Committee, though, you proposed unrealistic budgets that would have placed much of the burden of deficit reduction onto our most vulnerable, low-income communities and communities of color. At the same time, you supported disinvesting in the very programs that help lift Americans out of poverty and into the middle class. Such an approach is dangerous to our nation's future and will only lead to further division and partisanship, especially at a time when the various challenges to combating poverty requires us to work in concert.

With your election as Speaker, we are hoping that you will pursue a different approach by working with us to support measures that will have a real and positive impact for our most vulnerable who are struggling with economic and material hardship. There are many areas where we can partner to reduce the scourge of homelessness, hunger, unemployment and underemployment, and lack of access to adequate and high-quality health care and education. One of these is reduction in eligibility age for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to twenty-one years for those without children, which would help improve conditions for millions of Americans living in poverty, and is a change you have supported. Another is reaching a bargain on a long-term, bipartisan agreement to replace the harmful sequester with an alternative that is not only

fiscally sustainable, but that enables Congress to invest in critical anti-poverty initiatives and economic growth over the coming years.

As you know, with last month's short-term budget deal in place, we have an opportunity now to appropriate in a way that provides some relief to our most vulnerable who would have been impacted by painful sequester cuts to housing assistance, Head Start, Meals on Wheels, job training, early childhood education, and public health. However, there is more we must do to provide the certainty and flexibility needed to solve our poverty and inequality challenges over the long-term. We hope you will work with us over the coming months to build bipartisan consensus around the need to reach a long-term agreement that enables us to protect and expand Congress's commitment to fighting poverty and creating opportunity for all in America.

In an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* last August, you noted the importance of recognizing that Americans in poverty depend on federal assistance not because they are looking for a hand-out, but because they are seeking opportunities to better their lives and leave poverty behind. "People struggling and striving to get ahead," you wrote of them, "that's what our country is all about. On that journey, they're not 'takers,' they're trying to make something of themselves. We shouldn't disparage that." We are encouraged by statements like these and hope there will be opportunities to work together over the coming months to translate a shared concern for every person living on the edge and in poverty into real action.

Sincerely yours,



STENY H. HOYER
Democratic Whip



BARBARA LEE
Chair, Democratic Whip Task Force
on Poverty, Income Inequality, and Opportunity