

Labor Day Statement 2022

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BUILDING A JUST ECONOMY FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

The Church often looks at the well-being of society through the lens of the well-being of the family. As Pope Francis said during his visit to the United States in 2015, “We cannot call any society healthy when it does not leave real room for family life. We cannot think that a society has a future when it fails to pass laws capable of protecting families and ensuring their basic needs...”¹ This Labor Day, let us reflect on how we can build a more just economy by promoting the welfare of working families through both charitable works and through advocacy for improved policies such as expanding the Child Tax Credit and passing the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act. Advancing these two policies would have a profound impact on family stability, especially for families who are financially vulnerable.

Some recent reports have found the economy is returning to a pre-pandemic norm with regards to unemployment rates.² However, other reports demonstrate that, while wages are rising, much or all of the increases are lost to inflation, which affects low-income families the most and puts our economy in a precarious position.³ I pray that government leaders who deal with inflation may have prudence in addressing its complexities and challenges.

But pre-pandemic norms were far from perfect. Even before current economic uncertainties, women - especially women of African descent and Latina women - earned less than their male counterparts, including when doing the same work with the same qualifications. They filled the majority of direct care jobs, experiencing increased risk of injury, high stress, and exposure to illness while earning low wages.^{4, 5} They were the majority of caretakers for their loved ones, yet many lacked adequate family and medical leave policies. These and other economic challenges continue to affect working families and children.

This is also the first Labor Day since the Supreme Court’s reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. The ruling is an incredibly significant step towards healing the deep wounds of abortion and protecting all preborn human life. But our aim as Catholics has always been, and remains, to build a society in which abortion is unthinkable. This unique moment necessitates a society and an economy that supports marriages, families, and women; it demands that all of us reach across political aisles and work diligently to reframe social policies in ways that are pro-woman, pro-family, pro-worker and, thus, authentically pro-life.

One of the USCCB’s policy priorities this Congress has been [supporting](#) the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA). There is currently no federal law requiring employers to provide short-term, reasonable accommodations to pregnant women in the workplace and the PWFA would do so. Common requests include being able to carry a bottle of water, a stool for jobs that involve long periods of standing, or lighter duty for jobs that entail heavy lifting. Women in low-wage and physically demanding jobs, disproportionately held by women of color, are regularly denied these simple accommodations and terminated or forced to take leave without pay.⁶ A number of states already have laws like this in place; however, pregnant women in every state should be protected by these standards. No woman should be forced to risk her or her child’s health, miscarriage, preterm birth, economic security or losing insurance benefits just because she requests a short-term, reasonable, pregnancy-related accommodation. The U.S.

House of Representatives has already passed this bill with strong, bipartisan support. Now, with a short time left in this current legislative session of Congress, we urge immediate Senate passage of this proposal that would make the workplace safer for women and their preborn children. Hundreds of Catholics who participated in this year's [Catholic Social Ministry Gathering advocated](#) for this bill in meetings with their U.S. Senators and we encourage Catholics to continue doing so through the [advocacy center](#) on the USCCB website.

The USCCB has also been actively [advocating](#) in favor of expanding the Child Tax Credit (CTC). In 2021, the CTC provided financial relief for families who were having difficulty making ends meet. Families largely spent this money on food, energy bills, housing payments and other basic needs. With rising inflation, continuing to expand this tax credit would be critically helpful to families forced to choose between buying food and filling up their gas tanks. Congress should move forward with a CTC proposal that has no minimum income requirement, includes families with mixed immigration status, is available for the year before birth, and is offered to every child – regardless of the size of the family. The CTC was enormously effective at reducing child poverty in 2021 and we should not regress from this progress.

Additionally, the USCCB supports federal paid leave policy, just wages, and the right to organize. We have long called for a system in which the whole of society enjoys fundamental human needs including nutrition, affordable housing, education, and health care. These common goods cannot be achieved through individual efforts alone, but require the collaboration and cooperation of everyone, and the exclusion of no one.

Just as significant as federal policy, there is much work that can be done locally to advance the dignity of work. For example, there are always opportunities to volunteer to help struggling families, such as with Catholic Charities. Additionally, the efforts of labor unions have helped union workers fare better during the pandemic than non-union workers, as they were more likely to maintain their pay and their jobs. To this end, the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) supports organizations that work on low-wage workers' rights and training, in an effort to eliminate labor trafficking and related workplace abuses such as wage theft.

Finally, in writing this Labor Day reflection, I am reminded of Monsignor George Higgins, who passed away 20 years ago this year. He was a fervent advocate of economic justice for all, working closely with unions and union organizers, including Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, and received many awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was the director of what was then called the Social Action Department of the bishops' conference and, in fact, wrote or was consulted on the U.S. Catholic bishops' Labor Day statements for decades. Inspired by him, let us continue his good work in building a just society for all. May the spirit and example of Monsignor Higgins inspire us, that we might have the wisdom to build up justice and improve the lives of workers and their families as he did throughout his life.

¹ Pope Francis, Prayer Vigil for the Festival of Families (Sept. 26, 2015). [Apostolic Journey - United States of America: Prayer vigil for the Festival of families at the B. Franklin Parkway \(Philadelphia, 26 September 2015\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation Summary (Aug. 5, 2022). <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Cost Index Summary (July 29, 2022). <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/eci.nr0.htm>

⁴ PHI. Direct Care Worker Disparities: Key Trends and Challenges (Feb. 8, 2022). <https://www.phinational.org/resource/direct-care-worker-disparities-key-trends-and-challenges/>

⁵ PHI. Workplace Injuries and the Direct Care Workforce (April 20, 2018). <https://www.phinational.org/resource/workplace-injuries-direct-care-workforce/>

⁶ A Better Balance. Long Overdue: It is Time for the Federal Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (May 2019). <https://www.abetterbalance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Long-Overdue.pdf>