



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL®, INC.

April 30, 2025

Dear Member of Congress:

Earlier this month, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA (SVdP) opened its second National Office in Washington D.C. This office will allow us to work more closely with you and other organizations in strengthening the Society's ability to accomplish our mission of building a more just world through personal relationships with and service to people in need.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded in France in 1833 and, just 12 years later, established roots in the United States. On November 20th of this year, we will celebrate the 180th anniversary of the founding of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul at the Basilica of St. Louis in St. Louis, Missouri, where our primary national office remains located to this day.

Nearly 90,000 Vincentian volunteers in 4,428 parishes throughout the United States serve more than five million people annually in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Our founding activity, still practiced today, is the face-to-face Encounter, in which Vincentians visit those they serve wherever they may be to identify and help with both immediate and longer-term needs.

As a result of our personal relationships with persons experiencing poverty, dependence, and need, we have a unique and important perspective on the issues facing our nation as solutions are developed and discussed to address the many challenges of our day.

In our work, we have become profoundly aware that housing instability is a critical problem in the U.S. And it is an issue that SVdP is uniquely qualified to address. In 2023 alone, we mobilized \$60 million in emergency financial assistance to prevent evictions and keep people housed. Every day, Vincentians provide help and hope to unhoused members of our communities through rental and utility assistance, food pantries, charitable pharmacies, day centers, transitional housing for persons with disabilities and veterans, as well as numerous other works of charity. But we also know that much more must be done. Over 770,000 people experienced homelessness in 2024, an 18% increase over 2023.¹ That is why SVdP launched a national campaign to highlight homelessness prevention.

The Catholic Church teaches that housing is a basic human right, and the Catholic bishops of the U.S. have stated that widespread homelessness is a "national disgrace" and the lack of decent housing a "sign of serious social neglect and moral failure."² Thus, in addition to our ministries and direct services to persons at risk of homelessness, we look forward to our increased presence in D.C. allowing us to work more closely with members of Congress in order to inform policy-making that will better serve our most vulnerable and marginalized neighbors, particularly in preventing homelessness.

Homelessness prevention through early intervention is far less costly than supporting someone experiencing chronic homelessness, with services for a chronically homeless person costing taxpayers an average of

¹ *The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, Dec. 2024.

² *Homelessness and Housing: A Human Tragedy, A Moral Challenge*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Mar. 1988.

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\$35,578 per year in comparison to \$2,000 in temporary financial assistance to prevent homelessness.^{3, 4} It also promotes healthier and more stable communities while upholding the inherent, God-given dignity of persons at risk of homelessness. No one should be forced to choose between their basic human rights, having to make decisions between paying for their housing, their medical care, or their food.

As you fulfill your important work in the 119th Congress, I urge you to work across the aisle to legislate with compassion for poor and vulnerable people, which transcends partisanship. Several factors contribute to housing insecurity, and preventing homelessness requires much more than paying someone's rent. Rather, it must address all forms of poverty so that people can afford to stay in their homes. I encourage you to consider SVdP's policy priorities including:

- Increase the supply of affordable housing, specifically rental homes for persons with the lowest incomes and funding for emergency rental assistance
- Fund programs that help economically vulnerable people live in dignity, such as with heating and cooling costs through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program
- Provide funding to aid persons who are displaced from their homes following a natural disaster
- Maintain crucial health care and nutrition programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC
- Ensure that tax reform assists, and does not harm, persons in poverty, including by expanding the Child Tax Credit so it benefits the poorest families, expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit for poor and low-income workers without children, and reforming the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit to better serve the lowest-income households
- Invest in workforce development services for low-income workers and for formerly incarcerated individuals
- Support working parents by funding Head Start programs and strengthening paid family leave policies

Our SVdP volunteers experience firsthand and address the greatest needs of the constituents in your district every day. We also observe and actively participate in the most effective solutions. It is our hope that this perspective will aid you as you develop policies that will have a lasting impact on our nation.

As we grieve the recent passing of Pope Francis, I leave you with words from his final encyclical, *He Loved Us (Dilexit Nos)*: "I never tire of repeating that Jesus told us this in the clearest terms possible: 'Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40). He now asks you to meet him there, in every one of our brothers and sisters, and especially in the poor, the despised and the abandoned members of society. What a beautiful encounter that can be!" (no. 231).

With great hope for our work together and with sincere gratitude for your consideration of SVdP's perspective,



John Berry
National President
Chair of the Board of Directors

³ *Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money*, National Alliance to End Homelessness, Feb. 2017.

⁴ *Targeted prevention helps stop homelessness before it starts*, University of Notre Dame, Jul. 2023.