

Faith leaders call for expanded child tax credit

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Faith leaders joined members of Congress on Capitol Hill Dec. 15 to voice support for the expansion of the child tax credit, urging lawmakers to reinstate a broader version of the anti-poverty benefit before the end of the year.

“For many of us, this is a season of miracles—the miracle of Jesus’ birth, the miracle of Hanukkah,” said Abibat Rahman-Davies of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker group. “But expanding the [child tax credit]? That shouldn’t take a miracle.”

The event was part of a sustained advocacy push by a group of faith leaders from across the theological spectrum who joined forces to push for lawmakers to embrace an expanded version of the credit that helps combat child poverty.

Earlier this year, the group published an advertisement in *Politico Magazine* and sent a letter to all 535 members of Congress and to the White House asking them to make the child tax credit “fully refundable and available to low-income families on a permanent basis.”

Lawmakers allowed the expanded version of the credit, which was created as part of the American Rescue Plan, to expire last year, sparking frustration among anti-poverty advocates. Members are currently wrangling over competing last-minute proposals put forward by both parties in hopes of passing something as part of an omnibus bill before the end of the year.

Rep. Rosa Luisa DeLauro of Connecticut, who has often invoked her

Catholic faith in policy discussions, voiced passionate support for an expanded version during Thursday's event.

"I'm so proud of being a part of a living Catholic tradition," DeLauro said. "A tradition that unfailingly promotes the common good, expresses a consistent model framework for life and highlights the need to provide a collective safety net for our community's most vulnerable—and that includes our children."

DeLauro appeared to reference proposals floated by some Democrats that include tax breaks for businesses in an attempt to accrue Republican support.

"If we can provide tax cuts for America's corporations, we can certainly provide a tax cut for America's kids," she said.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Lutheran, tied his support for the credit to Matthew 25, a Bible passage in which Jesus says when his followers care for the sick and feed the hungry, they are caring for him.

Brown said he was once given a Poverty and Justice Bible, and noted how its translation of the passage's final line—"What you did for those who seem less important, you did for me"—resonated with his faith.

"It's so clear that that's our calling," said Brown, an Ohio Democrat.

People impacted by the child tax credit also addressed the gathering, explaining how the credit benefited their families. Rabbi Jonah Pesner offered a prayer, asking God to forgive the United States for a "year of suffering of our children" because of the expired credit.

The expanded version of the credit allowed families to receive as much as \$3,600 per child in 2021, a marked increase over the previous \$2,000-per-child payments. Advocates argue the increase made a significant difference

to struggling families, and that its disappearance resulted in dire consequences. Researchers at Columbia University found that child poverty increased 41 percent a month after the credit expired.

The event included the voices of theologically conservative evangelicals.

“It is an important time to speak up,” said Eugene Cho, an evangelical pastor and head of the anti-poverty group Bread for the World. “If you ask us why we should speak up, I can think of 12 million reasons,” he added, referring to the millions of children who struggle with poverty.

Galen Carey, vice president of government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals, also addressed the gathering. He argued the credit resonates with his group’s religious commitments, such as “safeguarding the sanctity of human life.”

“For those who are concerned about the sanctity of human life and protecting the unborn child, the child tax credit provides welcome reassurance to expectant moms and dads who wonder if they could afford to raise a child,” Carey said.

“It tells them that they’re not alone. And that if they choose life, they will not have to shoulder the costs and burdens of parenting on their own.”

He was echoed by Steffani Thomas of the Mormon Women for Ethical Government.

“As a woman of faith, I am guided by the scripture that I consider which policies will allow the largest number of God’s children to thrive, have self-determination and opportunities,” she said.

In addition to the Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice—whose executive director, Mary Novak, offered the closing prayer—other groups that sponsored the event included the National Council of Jewish Women,

Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Episcopal Church, Jewish Federations of North America, National Council of Churches, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference.

Before she left, DeLauro repeatedly urged faith leaders to mobilize their networks, calling on them to “overwhelm the Senate and overwhelm the White House” with calls from supporters.

“Congress is an institution that responds to internal pressure,” she said.