

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries:

Representing 170 national, state, and local organizations, we, the undersigned write in opposition to the Fiscal Commission Act of 2023 (H.R. 5779 / S. 3262), and fast-track commissions, in general. As you work to finalize Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations bills, we urge you to reject harmful policy riders such as a fiscal commission, which we consider a poison pill.

Proponents contend that a fiscal commission is essential to tackle the growing fiscal challenges such as a rising national debt, budget deficits, and long-term fiscal sustainability. While we understand the importance of ensuring our country is on a strong fiscal path, failing to meet urgent public needs will weaken our economy and our fiscal future, whether it is tackling climate change, decreasing poverty, providing health care, caring for our families, improving education and housing, among other priorities. Damaging the programs and services that help our communities meet their basic needs, and that play a crucial role in enhancing the well-being of vulnerable populations will set us backwards.

We are deeply concerned that H.R. 5779 / S. 3262 would undermine the democratic process by fast-tracking recommendations and accompanying legislation to cut federal benefits and programs without the ability of the public, through its representatives, to fully debate and amend all recommendations. As advocates committed to the democratic process, we are alarmed that the Commission would be granted expedited powers to make recommendations, effectively giving them the ability to sideline other human needs priorities to meet their arbitrary timetables. Further, we are alarmed that this legislation would allow the Commission's recommendations to bypass the amendment process and proceed without full debate. One of the key cornerstones of the democratic process is healthy debate and an amendment process to make improvements to bills. This approach disregards the core principles of transparency, public engagement, and robust democratic deliberation that are essential for sound policymaking.

Fiscal Commissions have a problematic history. They have either failed or their recommendations have led to problematic benefit and spending cuts. For example, the U.S. Joint Committee on

Deficit Reduction created by the Budget Control Act of 2011 produced a controversial plan that Congress could not bring to the floor, which set into motion mandated cuts under sequestration. Particularly alarming is the possibility of proposals to weaken vital entitlement programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, SNAP and Social Security. These programs are critical for the well-being of millions of Americans, and any erosion would disproportionately impact the most vulnerable among us.

The track record of past commissions, coupled with a documented resistance to putting revenue on the table, raises legitimate concerns that a deficit-focused lens would disproportionately target non-defense discretionary programs such as child nutrition, workforce training programs, public health, child care and transportation. These programs play a pivotal role in supporting the economic security and health of children and their families, and any emphasis on cuts in this area would exacerbate existing inequalities and diminish vital social services.

Raising revenues must be the central component of addressing fiscal challenges and increasing federal investments to meet the level needed for public services and programs, but there has been long-standing opposition from some policymakers to increase revenue. Some members of Congress have not supported significant tax increases since the 1990 bipartisan budget agreement, while pushing through significant, unpaid-for tax cuts in 2001, 2003 and 2017, all which added to the deficit. Furthermore, a revenue-centric approach with emphasis on the wealthy and corporations paying their fair share is broadly supported among voters. According to a 2023 Navigator Research report, four in five Americans support raising taxes on the rich and corporations to reduce the deficit compared to cutting Medicare and Social Security.

If Congress is serious about addressing the nation's fiscal challenges, one place to start would be the tax cuts benefitting the wealthiest among us, which are set to expire at the end of 2025. A full permanent extension of the expiring cuts would cost more than \$3 trillion. There is an opportunity, in the coming months, to evaluate these expiring provisions and our long-term revenue needs. We believe it is critical that Congress make fixes to the tax code to advance racial, gender and economic equity and increase fairness. This approach holds significance for both fiscal sustainability and helping improve the economic security of low-income and middle-class families. In addition, Congress should raise federal revenues by enacting progressive taxes requiring the rich and large profitable corporations to pay their fair share of federal taxes.

In conclusion, we urge you to oppose the Fiscal Commission Act and reject attempts to include it or other fast-track processes as a policy rider to FY 2024 appropriations legislation. We believe that a more inclusive, transparent and democratic process is essential for crafting responsible fiscal policies that align with the diverse needs and values of the American people.

Sincerely,

National

ACA Consumer Advocacy

Actors' Equity Association

AFL-CIO

Alliance for a Just Society

Alliance for Retired Americans

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Federation of Teachers

Americans For Democratic Action (ADA)

Americans For Tax Fairness

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Autism Society of America

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA

BCTGM International Union

Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen

Campaign for America's Future

Caring Across Generations

Center for Popular Democracy Action

Coalition on Human Needs

Common Threads

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Community Catalyst

Community Change Action

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)

DKG

Economic Policy Institute

Families USA

Family Centered Treatment Foundation

First Focus

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Futures Without Violence

Groundwork Action

Health Care for America Now (HCAN)

Impact Fund

Indivisible

Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)

Jewish Women International

Lutheran Services in America

Main Street Alliance

MD Poor People's Campaign

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Methodist Church

MomsRising

MoveOn

National Action Network

National Adult Day Services Association

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA)

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

National Association of Social Workers

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Community Action Partnership

National Council on Aging (NCOA)

National Diaper Bank Network

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Education Association

National Employment Law Project (NELP)

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Health Law Program

National Homelessness Law Center

National Nurses United

National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)

National Rainbow PUSH Coalition

National Urban League

National Women's Law Center

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

People Power United

P.O.S.T Protect our Stolen Treasures

Protect Our Care

Public Citizen

Responsible Wealth

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Social Security Works

Strengthen Social Security Coalition

The AIDS Institute

The Arc of the United States

UAW

Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

United Mine Workers of America

United for a Fair Economy

United Steelworkers (USW)

Unrig Our Economy

Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Youth and Women for Change in Eswatini

VoteVets

WZA Consultant

ZERO TO THREE

20/20 Vision

State

Action NC

Action Together New Jersey

AIDS Foundation Chicago

Battle Born Progress

Big Sky 55+

Citizen Action/Illinois

Citizen Action of New York

Citizen Action of Wisconsin

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative

Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc.

Courage California

Disability Law Center (MA)

Disability Policy Consortium

Educate.Advocate.

FLARA

Florida Alliance for Retired Americans

Granite State Organizing Project

Hawaii Children's Action Network Speaks!

Healthy California Now

Honest Arizona

Hunger Free Vermont

Indian People's Action

Iowa Citizen Action Network

Justice In Aging

Kent Street Coalition

Maine People's Alliance

NC Alliance for Retired Americans

NCJW- PA

Nebraska Appleseed

New Jersey Association on Correction

New Jersey Citizen Action

New Jersey Tenants Organization

New York StateWide Senior Action Council

North Carolina Budget & Tax Center

Our Children Oregon

Pennsylvania Health Access Network

People's Action
Progress Iowa
Progressive Maryland
Protect All Children's Environment
Public Justice Center
Utahns Against hunger
Virginia Community Rights Network
Virginia Organizing
West Virginia Council of Churches
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

Local

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 770
Board Member, St. Vincent De Paul Society, Archdiocese of St. Louis
CAP OC - OC Food Bank
CAP Tulsa
Compass Affordable Housing
Democratic Marlborough City Comm.
Dominican Sisters of Peace
Environmental Services, Inc.
Euclid Hunger Center
Food Bank of Northern Nevada
Generations United
Goddard Riverside-NYC
GoFarm
Grand St. Settlement
Habitat for Humanity Chicago

Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen & Pantry

Holy Cross Parish, Philadelphia

Hudson County Central Labor Council

Indivisible Prickly Pears Nye County

Long Beach Gray Panthers

Metro New York Health Care for All

Norfolk Raymondville Food Pantry/ Community Lunch Program for Kids

Open Hearth, Inc.

Partners in Care Foundation

Resident United Network Los Angeles

RESULTS Dallas Global

South Coast Interfaith Council

West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation

Worcester County Food Bank