

January 24, 2012

## Dear Mr. President and Honorable Members of Congress,

We look forward to the upcoming State of the Union address to reflect on this past year and plan for our future.

The Occupy movement has lain bare what we have known for a very long time: America is a nation of tremendous, painful inequality. Low-income communities and communities of color who were already the furthest behind were hit first and worst by the recession and are still struggling to recover.

The nation's demographic transformation is bringing new urgency to this challenge. Today, nearly half of all young people are people of color. ***By 2042, people of color will be the majority in America.*** Yet, racial disparities in employment, education, health, wealth, and opportunity are wide and persistent, dragging down the economy and holding back our country's untapped potential.

We cannot allow these dramatic disparities to continue. ***We need a more equitable economy***—one in which everyone has the opportunity to participate and prosper. America's success—today and tomorrow—will rely on investments in the *people, places, and projects* that best leverage our collective talents.

Simply, ***equity is the superior growth model for our future.***

We, the undersigned, stand for an equity-driven economy that must:

### ***Ensure meaningful employment for all***

Too many Americans are unemployed, with people of color disproportionately affected (11 percent of Hispanics, 15.8 percent of African Americans, and 8.5 percent of whites). We must create middle-wage jobs, strengthen workforce training for communities of color with the highest unemployment rates, and focus on youth employment. All policies should target hiring of local residents, especially lower-income people, women, and people of color. We must ensure that all have access to quality jobs with worker protections and living wages.

#### ***Policies for Equity***

- ✓ **Emergency Jobs to Restore the American Dream Act (H.R. 2914)** would provide \$227 billion over two years to repair public school buildings and establish a national service corps to put thousands of young people to work.
- ✓ **Saving America's Youth: Youth Employment Act of 2011 (H.R. 1901)** would create jobs by providing employers of disadvantaged youth up to \$4000 per employee and supporting student training programs.

## ***Invest in infrastructure projects that rebuild communities***

Infrastructure priorities should focus on communities most in need of revitalization and where investment also creates job opportunities. Maximizing efforts to contract with local- and minority-owned businesses will also enhance the participation of people of color in a region's economy.

### ***Policies for Equity***

- ✓ **Building and Upgrading Infrastructure for Long-Term Development (S. 652)** would establish a National Infrastructure Bank to provide loans and grants to support infrastructure investments critical to U.S. economic competitiveness.
- ✓ **The Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act** would invest in the nation's roads, sidewalks, trails, and transit. Incorporation of Sen. Gillibrand's **Construction Careers Demonstration Program amendment** would encourage the hiring of veterans, low-income people, and underrepresented workers.
- ✓ **Livable Communities Act (S. 1621/H.R. 3325) and Sustainable Communities Investment** would codify interagency partnership between HUD, DOT, and the EPA to strengthen coordinated investments in transit, affordable housing, and the connection of low-income people to jobs.

## ***Enact fair fiscal, financial, and foreclosure reforms***

The gap in wealth between white and African American families has more than quadrupled in the past two decades. Taxing financial transactions, banning predatory lending, and ensuring access to banking services for those who are currently underserved will promote wealth and a stronger economy

### ***Policies for Equity***

- ✓ **Fairness in Taxation Act (H.R. 1124)** would raise the ceiling on payroll taxes and end tax cuts on highest-earning millionaires and billionaires.
- ✓ **Preserving Homes and Communities Act (H.R. 1477)** would expand and improve loan modification programs by requiring evaluation and support to qualified homeowners prior to foreclosure.

## ***Enable all children and young people to reach their full potential***

By making significant early investments in education, coupled with bold changes in criminal justice policies, vocational investments, job pathways post-prison, and reductions in incarceration, we can generate opportunity for all.

### ***Policies for Equity***

- ✓ **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization** would target investments for pre-K through college success to disadvantaged students and school districts. Incorporation of **Promise Neighborhoods Act of 2011 (S. 1004 and H.R. 2098)** into ESEA would help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and help children in low-income neighborhoods succeed academically.
- ✓ **Increased funding for Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Child Care and Development Block Grant** would dramatically reduce educational and income disparities and improve overall competitiveness of the U.S. economy.

## ***Promote healthy people and healthy communities***

Changing farm policies to make healthy foods, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables, more available and affordable will improve the nation's food supply, provide needed jobs, and support better health. A focus on prevention will reduce chronic illnesses, a major component of spiraling health costs with disproportionate impact on low-income communities and people of color.

### ***Policies for Equity***

- ✓ **Promote a farm bill that can be the nation's food bill** by including policies that foster the cultivation, distribution, and the sale of healthy food. The **Healthy Food Financing Initiative (H.R. 3525/S. 1926)** would provide loans and grants to open new supermarkets and fresh food retailers to improve access to healthy food in underserved areas.
- ✓ **Fully fund the Prevention Fund and Community Transformation Grants as part of the implementation of the Affordable Care Act** to reduce the incidence of costly chronic diseases, help improve health, and control health-care spending.

## ***Ensure fair participation and representation in the democratic process***

Representative government needs all people to vote. We must ensure and enforce voting rights for the growing majority of people of color through constitutional protections and measures to increase voter participation. We must also remove the corrosive effect of money in politics, which creates a lack of accountability and transparency in the election process, and makes economic reforms for the 99% much more difficult to pass.

### ***Policies for Equity***

- ✓ **Overturn the Citizens United Supreme Court Decision** through a constitutional amendment that restricts the money surging through PACs, and clarifies that the First Amendment does not apply to for-profit corporations.
- ✓ **The DISCLOSE Act (Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections) (H.R. 5175/S. 3295)** would require groups accepting corporate donations for political uses to disclose their funders.

2011 will go down in history as the year that inequality was exposed. 2012 must be the year that inequality is addressed. **Let's build an economy that works for all of us.**

Visit [www.policyLink.org/LetterToCongressAndPresident](http://www.policyLink.org/LetterToCongressAndPresident) now to read more about this statement.

Sincerely,

PolicyLink

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*Organizations signed on as of January 24, 2012*

## **National Organizations**

Amalgamated Transit Union  
Campaign for America's Future  
CFED  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Green for All  
Insight Center for Community Economic Development  
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)  
National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)  
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (CAPACD)  
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force  
Partnership for Working Families  
Rebuild the Dream  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond  
United for a Fair Economy  
United Methodist Women, Washington Office of Public Policy  
Urban Strategies, Inc.  
William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI)  
YouthBuild USA

## **State and Local Organizations**

1950 Bryant Avenue Tenants' Association, NY	Black Family Development, MI	East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Inc., MN
A World Fit For Kids!, CA	CAN-Act, CA	Economic Development Center, CA
Abinader Group, CA	Career Academy Support Network, CA	Family & Community Development Services, MI
Activists With A Purpose, MS	CASA of Oregon, OR	Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities (FFHC), IL
Advocating Change Together, Inc., MN	Charleston Community and Family Development Corporation, SC	Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, GA
All, Us, We, GA	Christie and Associates, TX	Forum for Youth Investment, DC
Alliance Community Outreach Program, Inc., OH	City of Chico, CA Department of Neighborhood Services, CA	Four Bands Community Fund, SD
Alliance for Metro Stability, MN	Clare Gardens, Inc., CO	Generation Genesis.org, PA
Alliance Institute, LA	Community Action Partnership, DC	Global Community Rights Framework Initiative, FL
AntiRacist Alliance of New York, NY	Cook County Place Matters, IL	Global-Local Links Project, FL
Archey and Associates, IN	County of Siskiyou Public Health Department, CA	Gray Panthers Association of California Networks, CA
<i>ArtsWork! Art Works for People</i> , CA	Dads Make a Difference, MN	
Asset Building Strategies, CA	Dayton's Bluff Community Center, MN	
Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII), CA	Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit (D4), MI	
Berkeley-East Bay Gray Panthers, CA		

Green City Growers  
Cooperative, OH  
Growing Power, WI  
Health Resources in Action, MA  
HealthPAOnline.org - NYC  
Health & Hospitals Corporation,  
NY  
HHG Higher Education  
Consulting, CA  
Holy Innocents Episcopal  
Church, MI  
Homes for the Upwardly  
Mobile, Inc., CA  
Hope Whispers Community  
Organization Inc., OH  
Humanitarianism First.org, PA  
ICAL, Inc., LA  
Illinois Asset Building Group  
(IABG), IL  
Innovations in Public Health, CA  
Ivy Tech Community College  
Richmond, IN  
Jauco & Associates, CA  
Jefferson County Place Matters,  
AL  
Jewish Community Action, MN  
Kingsley Elementary School, CA  
L.A.C.E.R. (Literacy, Arts,  
Culture, Education, Recreation)  
Afterschool Programs, CA  
La Clinica de La Raza , CA  
Latino Family Services, MI  
Learning for Innovation, CO  
Lyceum Partners + Design, MN  
Madison Area Bus Advocates,  
WI  
Metro St. Louis Coalition for  
Inclusion & Equity, MO  
Metropolitan Interfaith Council  
on Affordable Housing (MICA),  
MN  
Metropolitan Transportation  
Authority of Harris County, TX  
Minneapolis American Indian  
Center, MN  
MKS Consulting, CA

Montgomery Transportation  
Coalition, AL  
N'COBRA Indianapolis Chapter,  
IN  
New Mexico Health Equity  
Working Group, NM  
Nexus Community Partners, MN  
NJ Grassroots 4 Change, NJ  
North Lawndale Employment  
Network, IL  
Northside Information  
Exchange, MN  
NYCHA Citywide Council of  
Presidents, NY  
Oklahoma Health Equity  
Campaign, OK  
Operation SpringPlant, NC  
Oregon League of Minority  
Voters, OR  
Pacoima Beautiful, CA  
Partnership for Southern Equity,  
GA  
Pittsburg Interfaith Impact  
Network, PA  
PJ's Pen LLC, NC  
Prevention Institute, CA  
Public Health Law & Policy, CA  
Quitman County Development  
Organization, Inc., MS  
Raymond John Wean  
Foundation, OH  
Reinvestment Partners, NC  
Revitaliz, LLC, DC  
Rock Paper Scissors Collective,  
CA  
Roosevelt Institute | Campus  
Network, NY  
Rose Community Development,  
OR  
Sacramento Housing Alliance,  
CA  
Sage Financial Solutions, CA  
Simon Publications, MD  
Southwest Coalition of Atlanta  
Neighborhoods L3C, GA  
Strive, OH

Sugar Law Center for Economic  
and Social Justice, MI  
The Colorado Center on Law  
and Policy, CO  
The Colorado Fiscal Policy  
Institute, CO  
The Greater Cleveland Chapter  
of CSF) Carson Scholars Fund,  
Inc., OH  
The Maryland Center for Health  
Equity, MD  
The Michigan League for Human  
Services, MI  
The People's Institute for  
Survival and Beyond, LA  
Thinking Man Consulting, NJ  
Tomorrow Matters!, FL  
Transit for Livable Communities,  
MN  
Transportation Alternatives, NY  
Ubuntu Green, CA  
University of Wisconsin  
Population Health Institute, WI  
Vanica Cummings, CA  
WADE Institute for Self  
Development, LLC, MI  
Washington Low Income  
Housing Alliance, WA  
Watershed Research & Training  
Center, CA  
Watts Century Latino  
Organization, CA  
Western Mass Center for  
Healthy Communities, MA  
Westside Housing Organization,  
MO  
Youth Policy Institute, CA