

January 25, 2019

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose over 900 congregations across North America encompass more than 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, I write to urge you to immediately pass legislation to fully fund the government and end the partial shutdown, while working toward comprehensive immigration reform that treats all people with dignity and respect.

Individuals and families who rely on a functioning government for their paycheck or support for their basic needs are unjustly bearing the consequences of this shutdown. Although efforts have been made to ensure families receive critical SNAP benefits through February, if the shutdown continues, March benefits will be in peril. Even if the government reopens soon, SNAP recipients are likely to experience a lengthy wait before receiving next month's benefits, straining already-tight budgets.ⁱ The shutdown is threatening vital housing assistance, with tens of thousands of low-income households already affected by outstanding contracts between landlords and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The number of people at risk of losing their homes will only grow as the shutdown continues.ⁱⁱ Tribal nations are especially impacted by the shutdown. Despite the U.S. government's treaty obligation to provide health care, Indian Health Service programs have no fiscal year 2019 funding, causing Tribal governments to make impossible decisions about how to allocate resources.ⁱⁱⁱ And more than 800,000 federal workers in all 50 states are going without paychecks.^{iv} We urge you to address these challenges by swiftly passing legislation to reopen the government.

At the same time, we also believe that Congress must address the brokenness of our immigration system overall. There are legitimate imperatives around border security that deserve serious thought and policy proposals. Yet we reject the President's myopic focus on enforcement-only immigration policy in the form of a border wall. Instead, our immigration system cries out for comprehensive reform that addresses real challenges, beginning with a permanent legislative fix for DREAMers and holders of temporary protected status that includes a pathway to citizenship; the preservation of the right to seek asylum in the U.S.; and border security that is effective and humane, treating immigrants justly and with compassion. We urge you to judge any legislative proposal with these principles in mind.

Our historical experience as Jews who dwelled as strangers in others' lands sensitizes us to the imperative to ensure a just and compassionate immigration policy. Jewish tradition also compels us to work to address poverty and support those in need. We are not merely commanded to give to the poor, but to advocate on their behalf. We are told in Proverbs 31:9, to "speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy."

Inspired by our history and teachings, we implore you act immediately to pass legislation to open and fully fund the federal government and to work toward reforming our country's broken immigration system in a way that respects the humanity of all people.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

ⁱ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/many-snap-households-will-experience-long-gap-between-monthly-benefits-even>

ⁱⁱ https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/FY19_Shutdown_Factsheet.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.ncai.org/Native_Orgs_letter_to_White_House_to_re-open_gov.pdf

^{iv} https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/politics/shutdown-federal-worker-impact/?utm_term=.7adc3d51a2f4