

# Statement of the Bishops on the California Budget Crisis

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## *Bishops Call for Protection of the Poor, Real Reform*

The president of the California Catholic Conference, Bishop Stephen Blaire, Diocese of Stockton, called on lawmakers to give top priority during budget deliberations to those who cannot help themselves. The statement of the California Bishops was introduced at a press conference on Thursday at the Sacramento Food Bank, in the heart of one of the Capitol's most impoverished neighborhoods.

"The pain our people feel is real," said Bishop Blaire. "We see it in the faces of families we meet at parishes throughout our dioceses. We know it intimately from the dedicated work the staff and volunteers at Catholic Charities perform every day, as they offer help and hear the stories of tired, depressed and anxious individuals who have lost their jobs, lost their homes and cannot provide for their children, their families or themselves."

The Bishops' statement stressed that lawmakers must set clear priorities that address the "basic survival needs" of individuals and families first. They also called for real budget and tax reforms: "Real people and real families are paying a great price for California's budget problems. A permanent fix needs to be enacted," said Bishop Blaire. "We are in an economic crisis," said Bishop Jaime Soto, Diocese of Sacramento, "but we, as Californians, should continue to support those in need, those who are suffering the most because they are without basic resources. Let's continue our acts of charity especially to marginalized individuals and families. Together let's fulfill this commitment." Bishops Blaire and Soto were joined at the press event by retired Sacramento Bishop, William Weigand; Ned Dolejsi, executive director of the Conference; Fr. Michael Kiernan, Diocese of Sacramento Catholic Charities Director; Shannon Lahey, executive director of Catholic Charities of California; and Blake Young, President of the Sacramento Food Bank.

## **CA Catholic Bishops Urge Legislators Give Top Priority To Programs Serving Children, Disabled & Unemployed Who Can't Help Themselves**

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**SACRAMENTO** – *The California Catholic Conference released the following statement at a news conference this morning urging lawmakers to undertake*

*major tax and budget reforms and give top priority to programs that provide for the basic needs of children, the disabled and those poor and unemployed who cannot provide for themselves, before funding less urgently needed services.*

“Combined with the worldwide recession, the State’s worst budget crisis since the Great Depression has sent Californians reeling, especially those who are poor, sick, or vulnerable and who turn to government and charity as their last resort.

“The pain our people feel is real. We see it in the faces of families we meet at parishes throughout our dioceses. We know it intimately from the dedicated work the staff and volunteers at Catholic Charities perform every day, as they offer help and hear the stories of tired, depressed and anxious individuals who have lost their jobs, lost their homes and cannot provide for their children, their families or themselves.

“As bishops and as pastors in our dioceses, we don’t presume to have all the answers when it comes to solving our state’s serious budget problems. However, we do feel an obligation to speak-up and to offer a moral voice on behalf of vulnerable people and families who may be unable or unaccustomed to speaking for themselves.

“As they go about their deliberations, we believe it is critical that lawmakers are guided by two fundamental principles:

1. **“Lawmakers have to set clear priorities.** Necessary budget cuts should not start with the wholesale elimination of programs which support our poorest and most vulnerable residents. People and families have basic survival needs that have to be addressed first. This means providing for children, the disabled and those poor and unemployed who cannot provide for themselves – and then providing for everything else.

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2. **“Budget and tax reform need to be addressed now, not later.** Real people and real families are paying a great price for California’s budget problems. A permanent fix needs to be enacted so that everyone who relies on state government, especially the poor and vulnerable, won’t be in a constant state of upheaval, worried they will be cut-off from the basic necessities of food, shelter and medical care.

“This crisis has been a wake-up call for everyone – for the public sector, the

private sector, for churches and other non-profits: that the responsibility we share to look after one another – to care for the least of our brothers and sisters – doesn't shrink when government funding shrinks. Many social service agencies, including Catholic Charities, are under enormous strain, but they will continue to work day and night to help needy families and individuals caught up in the painful effects of the financial crisis.

"It won't make up for missing government resources, but Californians are generous and we know they will do what they can.

"Solving the state budget crisis won't be easy. But legislators and the Governor should know we stand with them and will offer whatever support we can as they come to grips with the human and economic dimensions of this emergency.

"We pray that the Governor and Legislature will address the real human needs of our people as they work to fix California's budget. In this effort we want them to know they have our prayers."