

Testimony of Mr. John Hill
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The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
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Good morning Chairman Markey, Congressman Upton and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. My name is John Hill and I serve as the director for economic and environmental justice at the General Board of Church and Society – the social justice agency of The United Methodist Church. In addition, I am here representing the National Council of Churches – an organization that represents 35 Christian denominations, 100,000 congregations and approximately 45 million people in the United States.

Let me begin by stating unequivocally that The United Methodist Church and the National Council of Churches take seriously our call to be faithful stewards of God’s earth and believe global climate change is a real and growing threat to Creation with profound and potentially devastating environmental, economic and social consequences. For over 15 years we have worked to educate and equip our members and congregations to take action to reduce our own contributions to climate change and have petitioned our government to provide strong leadership in developing domestic and international frameworks to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

In recent years the faith community has developed a set of principles on global warming - principles that represent key tenets of our faith traditions and provide the lens through which we consider potential policy solutions. Those four principles are justice, stewardship, sustainability and sufficiency.

Justice is our first principle and for a very specific reason – God calls us to serve those living on the margins of society and to protect those individuals and communities living in poverty in the United States and around the world. Quite frankly, for too long climate change advocates have minimized the potential impact of climate legislation on the poor and opponents have used such impacts as a justification for inaction. Neither course brings us closer to a just climate policy and neither serves the interests of those we are called to be in ministry with. I applaud the leadership of this committee for holding today’s hearing where we can explore another way – a course that provides strong emissions reductions and protects low-income individuals and vulnerable communities.

We believe a just climate policy must first and foremost contain effective and mandatory emissions reduction targets in order to prevent catastrophic impacts for the people and planet we are called to serve. While this morning’s hearing focuses on the critical issue of how climate legislation will impact consumers, let us not forget the devastating impact of inaction. Rising sea levels, more intense storms, floods, droughts, and spreading disease vectors affect those living in poverty, communities of color and other vulnerable communities first and hardest. The Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2004 demonstrated all too painfully the devastating consequences that occur when storms of nature interact with the storms of poverty and racism that batter communities in the United States and around the world. Our churches were on the front lines and continue to provide aid and assistance to those struggling to rebuild – as we will be in every disaster that may come.

As someone who serves a global church, I am keenly aware of the cost of inaction on my brothers and sisters in Africa. Rosemary Mayiga works with farmers in Uganda and told me last year how her growing seasons are shifting because of climate change. For most of us, if the rains fall a few weeks later there is little impact on our lives. For Rosemary, that shift means crop failure and famine. Last year the African Bishops of The United Methodist Church issued a call for action on poverty and recognized that we cannot separate the plight of the poor from the plight of the planet and must act now to protect both. Inaction is not an option for us as people of faith.

But likewise, action must be centered on a vision of justice for all God's people. In developing policies we must ensure that the solutions protect the needs of the poor – that we don't push families deeper into poverty due to higher energy-related costs. The good news is that there are proposals – such as that outlined by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities – that we believe can efficiently, effectively and justly provide benefits to offset these cost increases for low-income individuals and families.

By using established and proven methods that provide financial assistance to consumers, we can put money back in the hands of low income families. Mechanisms such as an electronic benefits card will allow individuals flexibility in meeting their growing financial needs while ensuring that they are able to put food on their plate and a roof over their head. In addition to financial support, it will also be crucial to include efficiency measures for low income households. Weatherizing homes and replacing old appliances will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions while lowering the costs of low income consumers.

In developing these programs, it is important that the delivery mechanisms are designed to efficiently reach the highest percentage of low income consumers. We have concerns with the use of local distribution companies (LDC) and other utilities, as suggested in the USCAP proposal, as the provider for consumer rebates. These companies rarely have systems in place to identify those in need, nor would such a benefit offset all of the increased expenses low-income consumers face as a result of climate legislation. Instead, utilizing systems that are already in place to reach the most vulnerable among us provide efficient and effective ways to deliver financial assistance to those affected by climate legislation.

In closing, the faith community supports strong and quick action to address the dangers of climate change while ensuring that solutions mitigate rather than compound economic injustices. Those least responsible for the emissions that created this problem are most vulnerable to its effects. Let us not perpetuate further this injustice by forcing those same individuals to shoulder additional and disproportionate costs of proposed solutions. We believe financial assistance for those living in poverty in the United States and international adaptation assistance for vulnerable communities abroad must be a part of any climate policy and we look forward to working with the committee as you develop legislation. Thank you.