February 27, 2024

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

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

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

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

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