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October 4, 2019

VIA EMAIL

**RE: USCCB and CRS Support Venezuela Temporary Protected Status Act of 2019, S. 636**

Dear Senators,

We write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committees on Migration and International Justice and Peace, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to express support for the bipartisan Venezuela Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Act of 2019, S. 636.<sup>1</sup> It mandates the designation of TPS for qualified Venezuelans present in the United States, pursuant to Section 244(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. It also authorizes U.S. funding to help build regional and national capacity of the protection systems in host nations in Latin America and the Caribbean to respond more adequately to the large numbers of forcibly displaced Venezuelans. Given the unprecedented humanitarian crisis facing displaced Venezuelans, the U.S. must not only provide humanitarian assistance in the region, but also support humanitarian protection in the U.S. for those who cannot return home.

The ongoing political unrest, violence, and food and medicine shortages in Venezuela have caused over four million citizens to flee the country.<sup>2</sup> The Justice and Peace Commission of the Venezuelan Bishops Conference has recently noted the numerous violations of fundamental human rights inflicted by the police and threats to citizens' access to health and medicine.<sup>3</sup> While stability in Venezuela has been tenuous since 2015, it is continuing to deteriorate at an alarming rate.

On March 11, 2019, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) temporarily suspended operations of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas and withdrew diplomatic personnel from the country.<sup>4</sup> On March 12, 2019, the DOS issued a Level Four "Do Not Travel" advisory for Venezuela.<sup>5</sup> In issuing a subsequent travel advisory on April 9, 2019, DOS explained that in addition to violent political demonstrations and shortages in basic necessities (food, water, electricity, and medical care), the country suffers from high rates of violent crime, such as homicide, armed robbery, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Venezuela Temporary Protected Status Act of 2019, S. 636*, available at <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s636/BILLS-116s636is.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela to 4 Million: UNHCR and IOM," UNHCR (June 7, 2019), available at <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2019/6/5cfa2a4a4/refugees-migrants-venezuela-top-4-million-unhcr-iom.html>

<sup>3</sup> Linda Bordoní, *Venezuelan Bishops Urge Prosecutors to Uphold Human Rights in the Face of Violations*, Vatican News (Feb. 20, 2019), available at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-02/venezuela-bishops-justice-human-rights-violations.html>

<sup>4</sup> "U.S. relations with Venezuela," Department of State (July 8, 2019), available at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-venezuela/>

<sup>5</sup> *Venezuela Travel Advisory*, Department of State (March 12, 2019), available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Venezuela.html#/>

kidnapping.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported on July 4, 2019, that there have been an estimated 6,856 extrajudicial killings of government opponents between January 2018 and May 2019.<sup>7</sup>

These well-documented conditions have also been seen firsthand by our Catholic partners on the ground. Catholic Relief Services supports partners who report that of 15,000 children under age 5 being monitored, 76 percent show signs of nutritional deficit, and another 13 percent are living with acute malnutrition.<sup>8</sup>

Granting TPS will provide qualified Venezuelans in the United States safety for a period of 18 months. The distressing conditions discussed above show that humanitarian assistance is much needed. The protection designation is appropriate under the TPS statute based on at least two grounds: (1) that Venezuela is suffering from “ongoing armed conflict within the state” and, consequently, return of nationals to the country would “pose a serious threat to their personal safety,”<sup>9</sup> or (2) that it is facing “extraordinary and temporary conditions” that prevent nationals “from returning to the state in safety.”<sup>10</sup>

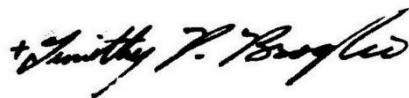
We believe mandating TPS for Venezuelans is also a moral, compassionate and necessary response. TPS would ensure that an estimated 150,000 qualifying Venezuelans here in the United States are not returned to dangerous and life-threatening situations,<sup>11</sup> and TPS would give them an opportunity to live with dignity, work lawfully, and provide for their families’ well-being until they can safely return home. For these reasons, we urge you to immediately pass the bi-partisan Venezuela TPS Act of 2019, S. 636.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. We continue to pray for Venezuela’s swift recovery and for the day when those who have fled to the safety of other countries may return home.

Respectfully,



Most Rev. Joe S. Vásquez, Chairman  
Bishop of Austin, Texas  
Committee on Migration



Most Rev. Timothy P. Broglio, Chairman  
Archbishop of the Military, USA  
Committee Intl. Justice & Peace



Sean Callahan  
President/CEO  
Catholic Relief Services

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<sup>6</sup> *Venezuela Travel Advisory*, Department of State (April 9, 2019), available at

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/venezuela-travel-advisory.html>

<sup>7</sup> “UN Human Rights report on Venezuela urges immediate measures to halt and remedy grave human rights violations,” UN Human Rights Office of the High Commission (July 4, 2019), available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24788&LangID=E>

<sup>8</sup> Catholic Relief Services, *Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis 1* (Jan. 25, 2019), available at <https://www.crs.org/resource-center/venezuela-humanitarian-crisis-emergency-fact-sheet>

<sup>9</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1)(A).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at § 1254a(b)(1)(C).

<sup>11</sup> *US: Offers Venezuelans in US Temporary Protection*, Human Rights Watch (March 8, 2019), available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/08/us-offer-Venezuelans-US-temporary-protection> (“The Venezuelan American National Bar Association estimates that there are about 150,000 Venezuelan nationals in the US who would qualify for Temporary Protected Status.”).