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A family is pictured in a file photo entering a food bank in in Monrovia, Calif. The U.S. Senate failed to advance a major tax package Aug. 1, 2024, that would have bolstered the popular child tax credit as a pro-family and anti-poverty effort, while cutting taxes for businesses. The bipartisan bill had cleared the House in January by wide margins. (OSV News/David McNew, Reuters)

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The U.S. Senate on Aug. 1 failed to advance a bill that would have expanded the child tax credit, a provision some Catholic organizations have long sought as a pro-family and anti-poverty effort.

The tax bill — The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act — was approved overwhelmingly by the House in January. But it failed to clear a procedural vote in the Senate in a 48-44 vote, failing to meet the upper chamber's 60-vote filibuster threshold to proceed to debate.

The legislation would have made more families eligible for the child tax credit. Reports from the U.S. Census Bureau, academic institutions and other nonprofit research organizations found a significant decrease in child poverty as a result of a COVID-19 pandemic-era expansion of the credit that has since expired.

In a press conference following the vote, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called it "disappointing and stunning" that Senate Republicans rejected the bill.

Schumer said the bill would have helped families and businesses, eased the housing crisis, and provided relief for those impacted by natural disasters.

"Rare is the moment that Senate Republicans are even to the right of the House Republicans," Schumer said.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said in comments on the Senate floor that the bill needed to undergo a revision process, and that instead, prior to the chamber's August recess, Schumer "decided to squeeze in one more vote that isn't ready for prime time."

"Colleagues on this side of the aisle have serious unresolved concerns," McConnell said about the bill, arguing it would "weaken work requirements."

"Today's vote isn't surprising, but it is disappointing," Patrick Brown, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center's Life and Family Initiative in Washington, told OSV News Aug. 1.

"If Congress is serious about being pro-family, it should pass bills aimed at helping reduce the cost of having and raising kids, which this bill would have done," Brown said. "The politics of an election year meant that a fairly straightforward expansion of the child tax credit to working-class families with multiple kids, plus some business credits aimed at spurring innovation, couldn't make it across the finish line."

Brown added, "It's going to be even more important for Congress to focus on expanding support for low- and middle-income families when it deals with next year's tax bill."

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In January, the House approved the legislation in a 357 to 70 vote.

The proposed child tax credit would have provided a tax break for qualifying households with children that could be claimed even by families who do not normally file a return. Households could have eventually received the full refundable value of the child tax credit so long as they earned at least $2,500.

Currently, the child tax credit is $2,000 per child, but the maximum refundable amount of that credit is $1,600.

According to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, families would have seen an average of $680 tax cut, with most of the impact felt by families making under $40,500.

The tax relief would have had a substantial direct impact on U.S. Catholic households. According to Pew Research, 55% of Catholic households make under $50,000, including 36% making under $30,000.

However, the child tax credit's current form is not permanent either. Without action from Congress, the child tax credit's current levels will expire after 2025 and revert to 2017 levels of $1,000 per child, affecting all families who currently benefit.