

Policy and Legislative Update: Appropriation Season Meets Election Season

Joshua Stewart, Director of Policy

Short Term Spending Package Extends Deadline, but Finalizes Veteran Spending

When Congress returned from their traditional August recess, they revived the work of funding the government for the upcoming 2017 Fiscal Year, which began on Oct. 1, 2016. However, they failed to meet the deadline with a full package that would fund the entire government, and instead settled on a continuing resolution (“CR”).

On Sept. 28 the House passed H.R. 5325, the legislative vehicle for the funding bill, which had passed the Senate earlier on that same day. The bill provides flat funding for the federal government through the election season and until December 9, 2016 in order to give Congress more time to pass full-year funding bills. Without the passage of H.R. 5325 the government was in danger of shutting down on Thursday, Sept. 30, due to the expiration of spending authorities at the end of the federal fiscal year.

H.R. 5325 also contained funding provisions that were not a part of the continuing resolution; this portion of the bill was the text of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriation bill (MilCon/VA), which funds the operations of the VA for the entire 2017 Fiscal Year.

The MilCon/VA portion of the bill contained the full presidential request top-line budget numbers for the Medical Services account, which covers VA homeless programs including GPD, SSVF, and the case management portion of the HUD-VASH program. Congress has, since June, agreed upon numbers for these programs: \$257 million for GPD, \$320 million for SSVF, and \$496 million for case management of HUD-VASH vouchers. All of these numbers are higher than last year, and the SSVF and GPD numbers are higher than the President’s Budget requested (by \$10 million and \$20 million respectively).

When the President signed the CR the day after passage through Congress, the bill became law. With it, the budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs was set until Sept. 30, 2017. This is by far the largest piece of funding that VA homeless programs rely on every year, but it did not cover absolutely everything. There is still much work to be done in the other appropriation bills to ensure robust funding for new vouchers for HUD-VASH, and for an increased expenditure on the HVRP program housed at the Department of Labor.

Between when the Congress returns after the November elections and when the new Congress gavels-in in January, they will have to tackle a funding bill to cover the other parts of government. The Transportation and Housing and Urban Development (T/HUD) bill and the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor/HHS/Ed) bill cover our two remaining programs.

New vouchers for the HUD-VASH program are contained in the T/HUD bill; specifically in the Senate version of the bill. There, \$50 million is allocated to fund roughly 6,000 new vouchers. The House version of the bill has zero dollars for new HUD-VASH, matching the President’s Budget request. Though this situation may not be hopeless; this was the case last year as well, and the Senate prevailed in final negotiations then. NCHV is working to ensure this is again what happens.

The Labor/HHS/Ed bill covers the HVRP program. After years of level funding at \$38 million, this year the Obama Administration asked for the full authorized limit of \$50 million for this employment program. The House version of the Labor/HHS/Ed bill agrees with the President’s requested numbers, though the Senate suggested a more anemic \$40.5 million. Again, NCHV is working to ensure the higher number prevails in negotiations.

Be sure to keep your eye on your email inboxes over the holiday season; NCHV hopes to bring you good (appropriation) tidings to make a Happy New Year.