

Policy and Legislative Update: Congressional Recess

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Work Remains from before the August Recess

When Congress left for the traditional August Recess in late July, they left a number of half-finished products in the legislative pipeline. Not least among these were the appropriations bills to fund government next year. The fiscal year for the federal government starts on the 1st of October. From Congress's return from vacation this leaves only seventeen "legislative days" (with both chambers of Congress in session) in which to fund the operations of government.

By the time you read this newsletter, the opening scenes of the yearly appropriation drama will have played out, and we as a country will know how (or whether) the government is to be funded. At press time for this article, we expect the Congress to resort to a "continuing resolution" to fund the government at current levels for several months, in order to buy more time to finish the work of appropriating properly.

From previous negotiations on the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations (MilCon/VA) Act this year, NCHV is confident that the numbers for programs that work to end veteran homelessness will be protected from cuts, and in many cases, increased. The House and Senate have already met in conference on the MilCon/VA bill, and the final product includes:

- \$257.47 million for the Grant and Per Diem program (\$10 million above the request),
- \$320 million for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program (\$20 million above the request), and
- An increase of \$47 million above last year's budget for case management in the HUD-VA Supportive Housing program.

In addition to finishing the appropriations process, NCHV also hopes to see Congress finish their work on the Veteran's First Act when they return from recess. The bill was unveiled in a bipartisan press conference of the Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee late in April. This omnibus piece of legislation combined many existing provisions from other bills which already existed in the Senate, including eighteen provisions focused on homelessness among veterans. For instance, if passed the bill would:

- Allow HUD-VASH residents to enroll in the HVRP program,
- Finally update the VA's definition of homelessness, to include the McKinney-Vento updates which allow individuals fleeing domestic violence to be considered homeless,
- Authorize a higher Per Diem rate to be paid to Transition in Place programs,
- Ease the transition for any GPD that wishes shift mission to permanent housing provider,
- Create a pilot program to test effectiveness of intensive case management on healthcare utilization rates,
- Permanently authorize the National Center for Homelessness Among Veterans,
- Create an annual review for the GPD program, and strengthen performance targets for program outcomes in the areas of permanent housing and income augmentation,
- Create an expansive public-private partnership ability for the VA to provide legal services,
- Allow Per Diem to be paid to support the care of dependents accompanying a veteran, and
- Permanently authorizes the use of VA homeless programs by veterans with "OTH" discharges.

This bill has yet to pass the Senate floor. As such, any of the above can change.

Stay tuned to NCHV communications (both here, and online!) to stay on top of what is happening with the Veterans First Act, with appropriations, and with everything to do with veteran homelessness.