

Hill Watch: Congress Releases Omnibus Spending Bill for FY2018

Contains good news for homeless veteran programs

Last night Congress made public its funding bill for Fiscal Year 2018, which runs from Oct. 1, 2017 until Sept. 30, 2018. The deadline for passage of the bill is this Friday at midnight; without passage of this or a short stop-gap bill, the federal government will enter another shutdown.

Contained within the text of this omnibus funding package (H.R. 1625) is an array of good news for veteran homeless programs – not just at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but also at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The omnibus proposes the following funding levels for our current fiscal year:

- \$340 million for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program (an increase of \$20 million over last year),
- \$257 million for the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program (flat funding from last year),
- \$50 million for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) at DOL (an increase of \$5 million over last year, and the first time the program has received a full appropriation of its current authorized spending limit), and
- \$40 million for new HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers good for roughly ~5,500 new vouchers).

But the good news is not contained only to budgetary numbers. Contained within the accompanying explanatory reports are instructions to VA on two deeply important issues relating to the HUD-VASH program.

The first is a direction that VA supply case management funding for the new HUD-VASH vouchers created in this bill. Since the President did not request new HUD-VASH vouchers, VA did not request case management funding for new vouchers. However, Congress has acted to create the aforementioned \$40 million worth of new vouchers. This direction ensures that these new vouchers will be case managed –and directs VA to supply a new budgetary projection for case management of all new vouchers. This effectively ends the unfortunate one-year delay between the creation of vouchers and the provision of case management funding we have experienced since 2016.

The second is a direction from Congress that will protect HUD-VASH case management funding from diversion to other purposes in FY2019. Following the confusion of the proposed conversion of HUD-VASH case management funding from “Special Purpose funds” to “General Purpose funds” within VA last year, Secretary Shulkin promised no conversion would be carried out during this fiscal year. He made no such promises for FY 2019, however. This language from Congress directs VA to propose any changes of this type in an annual budget submission; as that submission for FY 2019 has already been made, this should protect HUD-VASH funding at least through the upcoming Fiscal Year.

Prospects for passage of this omnibus bill are being hotly discussed in Washington and in the press; it is important to note however that no provisions discussed above are at jeopardy. NCHV will keep you updated on the passage of FY 2018 appropriations as they become available.