

Policy and Legislative Update: Trump Administration Releases Budget Proposal for FY 2018, Annual Conference Approaches

Joshua Stewart, Director of Policy

Administration's first budget released, goes to Congress for action

In mid-March, the Trump Administration released the first federal budget request of his presidency. For any administration a president's budget proposal is a document that lays out that administration's priorities for federal spending. This proposed budget is released every fiscal year by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and covers all federal programs, including those which we consider to be the mainstays of our work to end veteran homelessness. This proposal, however, is not an act of law; it is merely a proposal. Congress is the final arbiter of which program receives funding, and how much.

The budget proposal published this week is known as a "skinny budget," as it is much briefer than a budget justification released in a non-inaugural year. Because of the amount of work that a complete federal budget entails, and the short time afforded to a new administration to complete one, the publication of such skinny budgets is a standard practice among new presidents. A skinny budget, this one included, is usually light on detailed information about specific programs.

Despite that, there are a few takeaways that NCHV is able to share with you about the President's priorities, while still bearing in mind that Congress will change many things before funding legislation is signed into law several months from now.

First, is a line in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget chapter which states in full that the request "supports VA programs that provide services to homeless and at-risk veterans and their families to help keep them safe and sheltered." This sentence in the budget proposal, combined with the prioritization of veteran homelessness by the new VA Secretary Shulkin, seem to indicate that the VA's investments in community providers working to end homelessness will largely continue. In fact, the VA at large is slated in the proposal to receive an increase in discretionary funding of more than \$4 billion.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, however, would have its funding decreased by 13.2 percent, or \$6.2 billion. This decrease would come from a variety of programs and offices within HUD, including the complete elimination of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships, and Choice Neighborhoods programs. Rental assistance programs would also see a decrease in funding, although the budget says that these savings would be found through "reforms that reduce costs while continuing to assist 4.5 million low-income households." It is not clear at this time whether the HUD-VASH program is included in any of these proposed cuts, or what reforms are under consideration.

Similarly, the President's budget proposes to decrease the Department of Labor's budget by 21 percent, or \$2.5 billion. Part of this cut would include the elimination of the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), and a decrease in funding for job training and employment service formula grants, which may include the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) to provide employment assistance to veterans at American Job Centers. The Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) is not mentioned in the skinny budget by name.

Separate from the Departmental sections, the President's budget includes a list of several independent agencies that the Administration would like to defund. Among these is the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) which has played a critical role in the progress and successes that we have seen in our work to end veteran homelessness over the past several years. NCHV urges the President

to reconsider his position on USICH, and we also urge Congress to continue funding this necessary and impactful agency. To read more about NCHV's support of USICH click here, go to http://nchv.org//index.php/policy/policy/position_statements/ and choose the USICH paper.

NCHV commits to sharing additional information with all of you on the budget and appropriations process as it comes available. To read the Administration's Budget Blueprint, go to <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget>.

NCHV Annual Conference Coming in May

The Public Policy Session at this year's Annual Conference will be a chance to get attendees up to speed on what is happening on Capitol Hill, and to prepare them for meetings with Congress. Will you help yourself and fellow providers across the country to better serve homeless veterans, by walking the halls of Congress? Even if you have never spoken to your congressional offices before, NCHV will be able to prepare you for your first meeting. Are you already planning on taking these meetings? Let us know!

It is vitally important for the welfare of the veterans we serve that we all speak with a loud, clear, and unified voice on the most important national issues. If you want to be a part of the NCHV Advocacy Team and learn about how to advocate to Congress, or just join your own efforts with the national effort, please email me right now at jstewart@nchv.org.

Throughout the rest of the Annual Conference, there will be several policy-focused sessions for you to attend. At these sessions you will have the opportunity to hear about changes being made to policy, ask questions directly of federal policy makers in the federal agencies, and give input to NCHV staff as they work on proposals to change national policy. Please bring your questions and your expertise to these sessions! Members are crucial to the success of the Conference, to NCHV, and to the effort to end veteran homelessness nationally.