There’s no rest for aging advocates as Congress pivots from considering health care reform to tackling federal funding for FY 2018! On the heels of the debate to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act and restructure Medicaid, lawmakers in Washington, DC are turning to determining funding levels for Older Americans Act and other aging programs.

Delayed by both a new Administration’s late budget request to Congress and a procedural process keeping the last year’s budget window open in order to shepherd health care bills through both chambers, congressional appropriators got a months-late start to the annual funding process. However, appropriations season is now in full swing on Capitol Hill now, and it is essential that local aging advocates continue to echo the need to adequately fund and protect critical Older Americans Act and other aging programs.

Status of Older Americans Act Funding

After many challenging fiscal years for federally funded domestic programs, including OAA, FY 2018 may prove to be the most challenging yet. In May, the Administration released a federal budget request that made deep cuts to many domestic programs. President Trump proposed funding levels far below even those currently constrained by the federal Budget Control Act (BCA), which implemented stringent caps on defense and non-defense programs and has significantly limited federal funding since 2011.

Congress has largely rejected the full extent of the deep cuts that the President’s budget request outlined, but House leaders have also proposed funding levels below current budget caps. What this means is that, in the House, the bill that funds Older Americans Act and many other aging programs received an allocation that was $5 billion lower than last year’s levels, which resulted in cuts to a number of federal workforce, education and health programs.
House appropriators took the first steps toward hashing out funding levels for OAA and other aging programs in late July when the House Appropriations Committee passed a bill to fund the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) for FY 2018.

Despite high-level cuts that lawmakers proposed, House appropriators approved level funding for most core OAA programs. Although stagnant funding for programs that serve a growing population, meet a growing need, and cost more each year often translates to a cut for local agencies—sparing most OAA programs from House-proposed cuts in this incredibly challenging environment is an advocacy win!

Unfortunately, House lawmakers did propose deep cuts to a few key programs that support older adults. The Labor-HHS funding bill that passed committee would eliminate funding for the State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) and cut funding for Elder Justice by 14 percent. Also, lawmakers proposed moving the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) from the Department of Labor (DOL) to the Administration for Community Living (ACL), but in the transfer, they also slashed SCSEP by $100 million (25 percent) from current funding levels.

What Happens Next?

Ultimately, both the House and the Senate will have to pass identical funding bills for all federal programs. We have not yet seen the Senate Labor-HHS funding bill. However, we do know that Senate leaders have allocated more money overall for the Labor-HHS spending bill than their House counterparts did. We don’t know what this will mean for the many programs funded through the Labor-HHS title, but it is a better starting point for these discussions than House appropriators had. Also, in the Senate, funding bills require 60 votes to pass, which means that at least eight Democrats would have to approve the measure. Senate Democrats have been committed to rejecting cuts that go below the BCA levels in current law and have advocated for alleviating at least some of the pressure from even those budget caps, so a bill that does neither likely wouldn’t gain enough Democratic support to pass.

It is possible that lawmakers on both sides of Capitol Hill may be unable to push FY 2018 funding bills through normal legislative channels; and House and Senate leadership may resort to either passing a continuing resolution, or CR, that simply extends current funding levels into next year. They could also draft a funding bill that rolls multiple individual appropriations bills into one, known as an omnibus. As it stands, spending bills are still subject to the reduced budget caps for FY 2018, which trigger an across-the-board sequester if Congress exceeds those caps. However, we are hearing that lawmakers want to avoid the threat of sequester, and they could come to some agreement to raise top-line budget caps. Whether the President would sign any funding bill that increases budget caps is unknown, so there could still be a government shutdown showdown later this fall.
Why Now Is the Time For Advocacy!

The endgame for FY 2018 funding is unclear. However, **our best chance to fix the House-proposed elimination of SHIP and deep cuts to SCSEP and Elder Justice is to ensure the Senate fully funds these programs!** n4a recently [sent a letter](mailto:acampbell@n4a.org) to all Senate Appropriators encouraging them to fully fund these important programs, and **it is imperative that national and grassroots advocates also CONTACT SENATORS to tell them to REJECT the cuts to aging programs proposed in the House!**

**What You Can Do:**

- **If Your Senator is a Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee:**
  - Reach out and encourage your Senator fully fund all OAA and other critical aging programs that support older adults. Also, please tell him or her to ensure that the House cuts to SHIP, Elder Justice and SCSEP programs ARE NOT included in the Senate Labor-HHS bill.

    Make sure your Senators and their staff understand how SHIP, Elder Justice and SCSEP programs benefit older adults—their constituents—in their state. It is important to personalize this outreach. You can use n4a’s recent letter to Senate Appropriators as a template to craft your own outreach.

    - Ask your Senator to reach out to Committee leaders in support of these programs—particularly SHIP because it is at risk of being eliminated. It is imperative that Members speak up against these cuts, and YOU can help prepare them with talking points about how important SHIP, Elder Justice and SCSEP are in your communities.

- **Even if Your Senator is NOT a Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee,** ask him or her to reach out to colleagues on the committee—especially their Republican colleagues—to tell them to reject these cuts. It is important that as many Members as possible are weighing in against the proposed SHIP elimination and Elder Justice and SCSEP cuts.

**Timing is critical, as we expect Senate Appropriators to consider this funding bill soon!** So, please reach out **TODAY** to your contacts in your Senators’ local and Washington, DC offices. You can find contact information for your Representatives at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and use n4a’s FY 2018 Appropriations Campaign page to inform your advocacy!

---

If you have questions or concerns about this **Advocacy Alert** or n4a’s policy positions, please contact Autumn Campbell at acampbell@n4a.org and Amy Gotwals at agotwals@n4a.org.