



Keep Up Appropriations Advocacy During Recess! Lawmakers at Home for Two More Weeks

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Congressional Appropriators got a months-late start to crafting their FY 2018 spending bills, but we are now hearing that both the House and the Senate will consider their respective bills to fund the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) shortly after they return to Washington, DC after Labor Day. **This means that the next two weeks are a critical time for local advocates to drive home messages about the importance of protecting funding for important OAA and other aging programs!**

Status of Older Americans Act Funding

As our early August n4a [Advocacy Alert](#) details, we expect that FY 2018 will be a very challenging fiscal year for federally funded domestic programs, including OAA and other important aging programs. Not only did the Administration release a federal budget request that proposed deep cuts to many domestic programs, but also House leaders have proposed funding for many federal agencies at levels even lower than current budget caps.

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 Labor-HHS bill for FY 2018. Despite high-level cuts that lawmakers proposed for the bill, 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 the House Appropriations 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 When Congress Returns to DC in September?

In the House, lawmakers are planning to bring to the floor for a vote, a bill that would roll eight of the 12 annual appropriations bills into one. This bill, known as an “omnibus,” would include the Labor-HHS proposal that passed the full House Appropriations Committee last month. Because of both controversial policy riders that are expected to be included in the bill and cuts to non-defense discretionary programs below current budget caps, the omnibus is not expected to receive any Democratic support. Assuming it has enough Republican votes to pass, the House could be done with their appropriations work by mid-September—well ahead of the late-September deadline.

However, whatever the House passes likely will be unpalatable to Senate Democrats. Because at least eight minority members in the Senate need to support final funding proposals to advance them through the upper chamber, an FY 2018 funding bill from the House will probably be a non-starter across the Capitol.

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 yet know what this will mean for the many programs funded through the Labor-HHS bill, but it is a better starting point for these spending discussions than House appropriators had.

It is possible that lawmakers on both sides of Capitol Hill may be unable to agree on final funding levels; and that House and Senate leadership may resort to either passing a continuing resolution, or CR, that simply extends current funding levels into next year. 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 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 programs is to ensure the Senate fully funds these programs!** n4a recently [sent a letter](#) 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!**

Also, advocates should reach out to their Members in the House and ask them to support any efforts to increase SHIP, SCSEP and Elder Justice funding in a final House Labor-HHS bill.

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.
- **Reach Out to Your Representative(s) in the House,** and ask him or her to support any effort to increase SHIP, SCSEP and Elder Justice funding in a final House bill. n4a is working with several House champions on a possible amendment to the FY 2018 Labor-HHS bill on the House floor next month to “fix” these deep cuts to aging programs, but in the meantime, ask your Representative(s) for their support of increased funding for these programs.

Timing is critical, as we expect House and Senate Appropriators to consider their funding bills as soon as they return to DC! Members of Congress are home for two more weeks, so please keep reaching out to

your contacts in your local and Washington, DC offices. You can find contact information for your Representatives at www.house.gov and Senators at 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.