Victory! Omnibus Spending Bill Includes Substantial Increases for Aging Programs

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Late last night, congressional leaders released a long-anticipated $1.3 trillion omnibus FY 2018 spending bill that would fund the government for the remaining six months of the fiscal year. Preceded by a bipartisan agreement last month to raise overall federal spending levels for defense and domestic programs, the bill, which funds Older Americans Act and many other aging programs, provides the most significant funding boosts for many of these activities since 2010, and rejects many of the cuts the House and Administration previously proposed. In today’s challenging budget environment, securing increases of this size and scope is a rare and especially sweet victory!

These major increases are a testament to the committed, continued advocacy from AAAs and other Aging Network stakeholders, both to raise the budget caps that were arbitrarily eroding discretionary programs and to convince appropriators of the value of these critical aging programs.

n4a is still going through the 2,200-page measure, with special attention to programs that help older adults remain in their homes and communities. The following analysis provides an initial update about key programs that serve older Americans and their caregivers, and is accompanied by n4a’s updated appropriations chart.

Meanwhile, Members of Congress will now have to shepherd the spending bill through a speedy approval process or risk missing a Friday-night deadline to fund the government.

OAA and AoA/ACL Programs

Administration for Community Living (ACL), HHS

Within the Labor-HHS section of the massive funding measure, Older Americans Act (OAA) programs received a number of substantial funding increases thanks to the
aforementioned grassroots advocacy by OAA champions! Overall, the omnibus bill would fund ACL at $2.171 billion, which is $178 million above FY 2017 levels.

**Older Americans Act Title III Programs**

In a huge win for advocates in this incredibly difficult budget environment, funding for **OAA Title III B Home and Community-Based Supportive Services**, which has been a top appropriations priority for n4a for years, received nearly a $35 million (10 percent) boost for a final funding level of $385 million. **Title III C Nutrition Services** received a total $59 million (7 percent) increase ($490 million for Congregate and $246 million for Home-Delivered Nutrition Services), and **Title III E Family Caregiver Support** received a major $30 million (20 percent) boost as lawmakers proposed $180 million for the program. Additionally, OAA **Title III D Preventative Health** received a sizable $5 million (25 percent) increase, the first increase in years.

**Native American Nutrition, Supportive Services and Caregiver Support**

OAA Title VI Native American Aging Programs that serve some of the most economically vulnerable older adult populations in the country also received much-needed increases building on recent investments in the programs. **Nutrition and supportive services (Part A)** would be funded at $33.1 million and **caregiver support services (Part C)** would receive $9.5 million, which represents a $2 million increase for each line item, or 6.4 percent and 26.6 percent increases, respectively.

**State Health Insurance Assistance Programs**

Despite repeated requests from the Administration and lawmakers to cut or eliminate funding for the **State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)**, negotiators prevented additional harmful cuts and proposed restoring $2 million to SHIP, which was cut by $5 million in FY 2017. Final SHIP funding at $49.1 million represents a major advocacy win for local advocates who pushed to preserve these critical Medicare counseling services.

**Elder Justice and Adult Protective Services**

The budget request also provided a $1 million increase for **OAA Title VII Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program** and **Prevention of Elder Abuse and Neglect programs** ($20.1 million). The bill also builds on recent increases for Elder Rights Support Activities, including the **Elder Justice Initiative**—an ACL priority under the Obama Administration—and funds these programs at $15.8 million ($2 million more than FY 2017).

**Aging and Disability Resource Centers**

Funding for Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) also received a $2 million (25 percent) ending at $8.1 million, which represents the first federal funding increase for ADRCs since $10 million in annual mandatory funding expired in September 2014.

**Prevention and Public Health Programs**
Lawmakers were once again able to stave off repeated proposals to eliminate the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF), which was created in 2010 via the Affordable Care Act (ACA). PPHF provides a source of mandatory funding for activities devoted to boosting public health and using proven prevention strategies to reduce Americans’ rates of illness and disability. The bill proposes level funding these disease prevention and health promotion initiatives targeting older adults, including the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) at $5 million and Elder Falls Prevention at $8 million. Funding for the Alzheimer’s Disease Program, which provides funding for Alzheimer’s outreach and awareness campaign activities and long-term services and caregiver support programs, would receive a roughly $4 million boost with final funding at $23.5 million, including $14.7 million in mandatory funding.

**Other Key Aging Programs**

**Senior Workforce Development Programs**

Under the Department of Labor title, the Senior Community Services Employment Program received level funding of $400 million, which rejects both a $100 million cut proposed in the House and the program elimination requested by the Administration. While level funding is a win vis-à-vis those plans, $400 million reflects the $34 million cut to the program made in FY 2017.

**Senior Corps**

Lawmakers rejected requests from the Administration to eliminate funding for the Senior Corps programs (RSVP, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion) under the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and level-funded all Senior Corps programs at FY 2017 allocations of $202 million.

**Senior Housing Programs**

The omnibus includes great news for HUD’s housing programs, with some of the highest funding levels most programs have seen in years. The bill provides $678 million for the Section 202 program, which reflects $105 million for new Section 202 construction and project-based rental assistance and $90 million for service coordination. Aside from $10 million in FY 2017 for either new construction or preservation, the Section 202 program had not received new construction funding since FY 2011.

**Block Grant Programs Supporting Older Adults**

In the FY 2018 and FY 2019 budget requests to Congress, the Administration asked lawmakers to eliminate funding for key federal block grant programs that supplement and support the work of the Aging Network and other CBOs serving older adults at the local level. The omnibus bill rejects the President’s requests to pull funding from these programs, and approved flat-funding for the Community Services Block Grant at $715 million, and the Social Services Block Grant at $1.7 billion. The Community
Development Block Grant would receive a $300 million (10 percent) boost to $3.3 billion. The committee also approved a $250 million increase for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), for a total of $3.6 billion. LIHEAP helps low-income households and families, including many older adults, with heating and energy bills throughout the year.

What Happens Next?

The House is expected to vote on the FY 2018 funding bill today, and the Senate will take up the measure soon after. It is possible that Senate debate on the bill could go into the weekend, in which case, legislators would have to pass another short-term continuing resolution or risk a government shutdown. Like the overall funding increases secured in the FY 2018 and FY 2019 bipartisan budget deal last month, this bill will also require minority support in both chambers, as conservative Republicans are expected to vote against the measure. As of right now, we anticipate the President would sign the bill into law completing a long-delayed FY 2018 budgeting process just in time for advocacy for FY 2019 funding to begin.

Aging advocates can enjoy the wins in the omnibus funding bill, but must keep up the drumbeat to continue educating lawmakers about the importance of robust funding for OAA and other aging programs going forward. We encourage local advocates to reach out and thank your Members of Congress for supporting boosted federal allocations—we will soon provide suggested language in a forthcoming Advocacy Alert.

Another great way to connect with your Representatives and Senators to build on this advocacy win is to attend the upcoming n4a Aging Policy Briefing & Capitol Hill Day, April 18-19 in Washington, DC. Register today!

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This Legislative Update is an n4a membership benefit. For more information about these and other federal aging policy issues, please contact n4a’s policy team: Amy Gotwals (agotwals@n4a.org) and Autumn Campbell (acampbell@n4a.org), 202.872.0888.