



County Welfare Directors Association of California

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To: County Welfare Directors Association of California

From: Tom Joseph, Director, CWDA Washington, D.C. Office

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Re: Federal Update

Budget Process Begins Soon

Next week, the House and Senate Budget Committees are expected to adopt their respective federal fiscal year (FFY) 2016 budget resolutions. The budget resolution serves as a blueprint for the appropriations committees to refer to as the year progresses. It also will give some indication on whether the Republican controlled House and Senate will perhaps consider any reforms to entitlements such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In past budgets, the Republican controlled House did propose the block granting of Medicaid and SNAP, but the proposals were never considered by the committees with jurisdiction over the programs.

Given the Republican majority in both houses, there is a greater likelihood that the budget resolution will contain budget reconciliation instructions. The budget reconciliation process has been used in the past to make changes to entitlement programs and make changes in revenues. Such a process is exempt from a Senate filibuster because it limits floor debate and only requires a simple majority in the Senate for passage of a bill. President Obama still has veto power over any bill and it would take a two-thirds vote of the Senate to override him.

Policy Updates

CSEC: The House passed unanimously the *Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act* (H.R. 181). The Senate counterpart (S. 178) is expected to reach the floor this week. Both bills emanated from the judiciary committees.

The measures use an existing structure and identified funding source within the Department of Justice. Competitive block grants would be available to states and counties addressing the issue, with grants focused on collaboration and funding for services provided by entities involved with sexually exploited youth.

Since the bills are slightly different, the House and Senate would have to reconcile the two measures before final passage and submission to President Obama for his signature.

SNAP: Last month, the House Agriculture Committee held two hearings on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, calling them the beginnings of a 'top to bottom' review of the program. Republicans remain concerned about the significant increase in recipients during the recession and the relatively slow decline in the caseloads as the economy recovers. Since the farm bill was adopted last year, however, there does not seem to be any real opportunity to adopt any additional changes to SNAP in the near term. Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS), Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, has stated that he will not re-open the farm bill this year. It appears that any changes to the program would have to be made in a possible budget reconciliation bill.

Elder Justice Act (EJA) Reauthorization: While the EJA authorization expired last year, funding for the program continued, with the first \$4 million appropriated in FFY 2015 for competitive grants for elder justice programs. A funding announcement has not yet been issued. Many other federal programs have not been reauthorized, but they continue receiving funding. Representative Peter King (R-NY) has introduced a five year reauthorization bill (H.R. 988) with no policy changes proposed. Such a bill would serve as a legislative vehicle if Congress decides to review the EJA.

Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization: The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee adopted unanimously a reauthorization of the OAA. The bill (S. 192) contains a greater focus on elder abuse through prevention and screening training for Area Agencies on Aging staff. The reauthorization also refines the funding formulas last reviewed in 2006 to account for changes in the older adult populations among the states. States, however, would be held harmless for the changes between then and 2015. The Senate has not yet scheduled floor action. The House has not considered a similar bill.

Bill Prohibiting TANF Work Waivers: Last week, Representative Tom Reed (R-NY) introduced the *Preserving the Work Requirement for Welfare Act* (H.R. 1179). The bill is similar to one introduced last session. It would prohibit the Obama administration from waiving the work requirement in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The issue first arose in 2012 when the administration announced that it would consider waivers requested by states to use other policies to otherwise comply with the work participation requirements through different ways of engaging TANF recipients. Republicans contend that such waivers would no longer require work. No state has requested a waiver.

Ways and Means Hearing on Poverty and the Economy: The Human Resources Subcommittee which has jurisdiction over TANF, child welfare and other human services programs met for the first time last month. Four of the six Republican members are new to the Committee, so the Subcommittee is planning hearings to educate them on the issues. New Republicans include: Noem (SD), Meehan (PA), Holding (NC), and Smith (MO). The new chair is Charles Boustany (LA).

The first hearing was a broad brush review provided by academics on the state of the economy, labor force and poverty trends in recent years.

Other CWDA Federal Activity

Psychotropic Medication Use: CWDA joined a coalition of national and state groups supporting the Obama administration's FFY 2016 budget proposal to provide \$50 million a year under IV-E foster care to decrease the disproportionate use of psychotropic

medications among foster youth and increase the use of psychosocial interventions. The proposal also includes \$100 million a year in Medicaid incentives to states to improve the coordination of medical care for foster youth in order to decrease unnecessary psychotropic use.

A coalition letter demonstrating this support will be sent next week to the House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over the matter.

Therapeutic Foster Care: After reviewing the bill, CWDA signed on to a coalition letter supporting the *Family Based Foster Care Services Act* introduced by Sen. Baldwin (D-WI) and Representative DeLauro (D-CT). The companion bills (S. 429/H.R. 835) enjoy bipartisan support. The legislation creates a uniform, national definition of therapeutic foster care and baseline measures for quality of providers. The legislation also specifically addresses support for kinship families.

Cathy Senderling-McDonald Hill Visits: During the National Association of Counties' Legislative Conference, Cathy joined me in visiting the Majority Staff to the Ways and Means Committee and the Minority Staff of the Senate Finance Committee. Cathy briefed them on the collaborative efforts by CWDA, the state and California legislature to address the overuse of psychotropic medications among foster youth. Congressional staff also provided CWDA with some leads to pursue on how other states have addressed the issue.