

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

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In-Appropriate Budget Reductions

Appropriations Committee fails to provide planned increases

Despite major shortcomings, the FY2006 Budget adopted by Congress in April included necessary increases for homeless assistance grants, Section 8 vouchers, and the Health Care for the Homeless program. A budget is just a political document, however, and in the last two weeks the House Committee on Appropriations has substantially reduced the promised funding.

Planned health expansions threatened by budget reduction

Consistent with the recommendations of the President and the National Council, the 2006 Budget provided \$2.038 billion for the Consolidated Health Center Program. This would be a \$304 million increase over FY 2005 appropriations; 8.7% (\$177 million) of the total would go to HCH. In addition to supporting the 177 existing HCH projects, the increase would provide for new health care access points for thousands of additional homeless individuals. Regrettably, the House Appropriations Committee approved just \$1.834 billion, \$204 million short of the Budget amount. Though Health Centers and the HCH program fare better in the House bill with this 5.7% increase than do many domestic programs, the needs of many underserved Americans continue to go unmet. The full \$2.038 billion appropriation would improve access to health care for tens of thousands of poor and homeless individuals.

The House Appropriations Committee flat-funded the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program at \$55 million, not even keeping up with inflation.

Appropriators would exacerbate affordable housing crisis

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also was a victim of broken promises last week in the House of Representatives. HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance grants provide major support for supportive housing, shelter and services necessary to end homelessness and are essential to achieving the Administration's goal of ending chronic homelessness. The National HCH Council recommended a \$1.8 billion allocation for McKinney-Vento. The President requested \$1.44 billion, and the House appropriated \$1.34 billion, an amount short of FY1995 levels (in constant dollars). As a percentage of the U.S. budget, McKinney-Vento funding has declined over the last four years, and token increases such as the one now offered by the House will neither end homelessness nor pacify the advocates for those experiencing it.

The same House subcommittee that shortchanged homeless assistance grants was similarly tightfisted with HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8). Tenant-based rental assistance under Section 8 benefits approximately two million low-income households, and the

National Council recommends an increased appropriation to assist the 6.3 million extremely low-income households that pay more than half of their income for rent. The President's FY2006 budget request of \$15.85 billion (a 7.3% increase) is expected to be just enough to "break even," restoring 83,000 vouchers (i.e. households) that were cut from the program last year. The House's appropriation of \$15.53 billion, however, would be unlikely to make any significant gains or to restore the lost vouchers. The housing crisis demands, at a minimum, the full realization of the President's request. The HUD budget, in constant dollars, would still be less than half of what it was in 1980, a decline that is fundamental to mass homelessness in America.

The good news – House appropriations numbers are NOT final!

There is a long way yet to go in the appropriations process, and our work begins immediately. The HUD spending bill, having undergone "mark-up" in subcommittee, will be voted on by the whole Committee on Appropriations as early as this week. After Committee approval, the bill then moves to the full House for a floor vote. Health Center and PATH appropriations, having passed through the full Committee last Thursday, also await the approval of the full House. Each spending bill will then follow the same steps in the Senate, and the two chambers' bills will be reconciled in legislation that will be submitted for the President's signature for the fiscal year beginning October 1.

Now is the time to communicate with your elected officials in support of these important programs! Amendments are highly probable (some already implied) during each chamber's floor debate, and there are opportunities for advocacy at each stage of the process. Congressional leaders must hear from you that an earnest desire to end homelessness in the United States must be accompanied by a commensurate commitment of dollars. The appropriations process is the time for politicians to become representatives – for talk to become action. Let's make it happen.

ACTION:

- **Contact the people who spend your taxes!** It is incumbent upon us to speak with those who speak for us in Washington. Members of the House should be contacted immediately in support of *at least the President's full recommendations* for Health Center [\$2.038 billion], McKinney-Vento [\$1.44 billion], and Section 8 Voucher [\$15.85 billion] funding. Reach your Congressional Members through the web (www.house.gov or www.senate.gov) or by phone through the Capitol switchboard, 202/224-3121.
- **Watch for future appropriations news and *Mobilizers*** as the process moves forward!

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