

Progress on Emergency Relief and Stop-Gap Funding

President Trump Signs Temporary Funding Bill and Talks Restart on Emergency Virus Relief

October 1, 2020

With just days until Members of Congress return home for the final weeks of the campaign season, the Senate, House and White House have coalesced this week to both prevent a government shutdown and resume stalled negotiations over a comprehensive coronavirus relief bill.

Federal Funding Secured Through December 11

The House acted last week to approve a bipartisan measure to continue FY 2020 federal funding for defense and non-defense discretionary programs (known as a Continuing Resolution, or CR) through December 11. This effort to avoid a government shutdown moved swiftly through the Senate this week, and the President signed the measure into law with minutes to spare before the start of FY 2021 late last night.

In addition, the spending measure temporarily extended funding for a handful of expiring health care programs n4a advocates for: the Medicaid Money Follows the Person (MFP) Program and MIPPA funding to the Aging Network to conduct outreach and provide enrollment assistance to low-income Medicare beneficiaries. Both of these programs were set to expire at the end of November, so this short-term extension only provides a few additional weeks of funding and ensures that lawmakers will have to revisit longer-term funding when the CR expires on December 11.

At this point, we are uncertain about whether lawmakers will pass a long-term federal funding bill when they return after the November election or simply extend funding under another CR.

Intelligence indicates that Senate and House leaders have made major progress on full-year FY 2021 funding compromises and so therefore could possibly pass a proper bill and avoid a CR, but specific next steps likely hinge on what happens at the ballot box next month. More information about n4a's FY 2021 appropriations priorities and requests is available in our May letter to Congress and *n4a's 2020 Policy Priorities* released earlier this year.

Officials Resume Negotiations Over Virus Aid

Despite recently dashed hopes that Congress and the White House would find agreement on another round of coronavirus relief measures before the election, last week House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin returned to the negotiating table. While prospects of an ultimate deal are dimming, earlier this week, the Speaker also released an updated \$2.2 trillion dollar version of the HEROES Act, H.R. 925. Smaller by roughly one trillion dollars than the first House-passed HEROES Act, the new bill still makes significant investments in relief for state and local governments, expands health and nutrition programs, provides another round of economic stimulus payments to individual Americans, and includes additional funding for a number of health care and social safety net programs.

The bill incorporates recent bipartisan Senate and House requests—as well as advocacy asks from n4a and other national aging organizations—by including an additional \$1.175 billion for the Administration for Community Living, most of that for investments in vital Older Americans Act and other aging programs focused on supporting older adults and caregivers at home and in the community during this ongoing crisis. **This OAA and aging program funding is a noteworthy increase from previous emergency relief proposals and reflects the success of national and local advocacy efforts!**

Emergency Funding for Older Americans Act Programs

n4a appreciates that House leaders included significant additional funding for OAA programs and services. The updated HEROES Act includes **\$925 million** for the Aging Network. Funding in the updated bill includes: \$200 million for Older Americans Act Title III B supportive services; \$480 million in flexible Title III C1 and C2 nutrition services; \$20 million for Title VI Native American aging programs Part A; \$150 million for Title III E family caregiver support services; \$44 million for Title III D evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs;

\$6 million for Aging Network support activities to develop targeted outreach strategies to reach particularly at-risk populations; and

\$20 million for Title VII elder rights protection activities.

This emergency funding, if passed into law, would be available for states, AAAs and tribes to use through September 30, 2021. The measure also extends current funding flexibilities received under the CARES Act.

Additionally, the bill would reauthorize the Elder Justice Act (EJA) and provide \$175 billion in funding for critical Adult Protective Services and ombudsman activities under the EJA. The elder justice provisions included mirror a bill to reauthorize the EJA that was recently introduced by House Ways and Means Committee Chair Richard Neal (D-MA) and Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR).

Key Health Care Provisions

The latest iteration of the HEROES Act maintains a proposal supported by n4a, governors and state Medicaid agencies to increase the federal contribution to state Medicaid programs during the coronavirus crisis. Under the HEROES Act, states would receive a 14 percentage-point bump in the federal Medicaid allocation and Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) waiver programs would receive an *additional* 10 percentage-point increase.

[n4a promoted both requests in our advocacy](#) and will focus on ensuring that states are sufficiently supported to prevent cuts to optional Medicaid services, such as HCBS, during impending state budget shortfalls.

Robust Funding for State and Local Governments

Providing ongoing aid to federal, state, regional and local governments in the wake of the unprecedented national and international emergency has been a significant sticking point in negotiations over virus relief. Most states are facing—or experiencing—devastating budget crises of their own as revenues are down and expenses have increased due to virus mitigation efforts and other national emergencies. Because most are required to operate under balanced budgets many state-supported programs are facing staggering budget cuts unless Congress acts.

n4a has supported previous proposals to provide fiscal relief to states. While the updated HEROES Act does not go as far as the previously considered version, it responds to state and local government funding crises with a total of \$436 billion in relief.

Funding for Other Critical Programs

HEROES Act 2.0 also includes emergency funding for other critical state and community block grant programs, which supplement funding for and support the work of the Aging Network. The bill includes a massive infusion of \$11.4 billion to the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) program that sends flexible funding to states that many direct toward supporting Adult Protective Services and other aging programs. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) would receive a \$4.5 billion boost under the HEROES Act to assist low-income households and families, including large numbers of older adults, with heating and energy bills.

The updated HEROES Act also provides \$10 billion for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to cover cost increases related to additional program flexibilities and increased participation due to the economic emergency. Furthermore, the bill increases the SNAP benefit by 15 percent, eliminates work requirements and increases the minimum benefit.

n4a was also pleased to see significant investments of \$500 million for the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program; \$300 million for service coordination in senior housing communities; \$32 billion for federal transit programs, including \$1 billion for paratransit activities; and significant funding for emergency broadband investments to expand access to telehealth and other virtual service delivery and social engagement efforts—including removing limits on the lifeline cell phone program that many older Americans depend on.

Next Steps

As negotiations continue between the House and White House, Senate Republicans have initially balked at the overall \$2.2 trillion price tag of HEROES Act 2.0. Time is running short to come up with a compromise, but on the slim chance that lawmakers and the Administration reach an ultimate top-line funding figure, we could see Congress vote on a proposal in the near future. However, it is also possible that negotiations will falter and no agreement will move before Congress breaks for the campaign season.

Either way, ongoing advocacy will be essential to ensure that funding for OAA programs remains on the table. Stay tuned for more from n4a emails and our [COVID-19 page](#) for future updates on policy and advocacy resources.