

The United States House of Representatives has been working on their portions of the \$3.5 trillion **federal Budget Reconciliation package**.

The Education and Labor Committee (which has jurisdiction over the Older Americans Act [OAA] and other key aging service programs) introduced its portion of the budget reconciliation package with a \$761 billion bill. Thanks to continued advocacy and dedicated congressional champions, the package includes **an additional investment of \$1.3 billion in critically needed Older Americans Act funding**.

This bill, should it be enacted into law in its current form, would provide the type of direct appropriations that Congress provided in the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) **in addition to** regular, annual appropriations, may be spent over several years, and does not replace the forthcoming FY 2022 appropriations bill. This proposal **includes a waiver of the state and local match** typically required for OAA services for both the new funding included in the reconciliation package as well as retroactively to the funding provided under ARPA.

Specific OAA program allocations in the Committee's legislation include:

- \$655 million for OAA Title III B Home & Community-Based Supportive Services – including III B direct services; activities to improve the availability of services (including workforce initiatives); acquisition, modification, or renovation of facilities; and construction or modification of multipurpose senior center facilities;
- \$140 million for OAA Title III C Nutrition Services to support the modernization of infrastructure and technology, including kitchen equipment and delivery vehicles;
- \$150 million for the OAA Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program;
- \$50 million for OAA Title VI Native American Nutrition, Supportive and Caregiver Services to support the modernization of infrastructure and technology including kitchen equipment and delivery vehicles investment for sustainability of food distribution in congregate and home-delivered programs;
- \$50 million for OAA Title VII Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, a nearly 48 percent increase to the current level of spending for the LTCOP, clearly a pandemic-influenced decision to improve our nation's protection of nursing home residents;
- \$75 million for the Research, Demonstration and Evaluation Center at the Administration on Aging, established during the 2020 reauthorization of the OAA to improve assessment and promote advancement of the relationship between OAA programs and services and health outcomes;
- \$1 million to support expanding the reach of aging services that address social isolation;

- \$59 million for technical assistance or national resource centers under OAA Title IV to support technical assistance and resource development for older individuals who have the greatest social need, including racial and ethnic minority individuals;
- \$15 million for technical assistance centers or national resource centers focused on providing services for populations underserved in communities due to sexual orientation or gender identity;
- \$5 million to support multi-generational program and demonstration projects within section 417 of OAA; and
- \$100 million for the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP).

The Education and Labor Committee proposal also includes \$1.4 billion for workforce grants to provide competitive wages, benefits, and other supportive services (including transportation, child care, dependent care, workplace accommodations, and workplace health and safety protections) to direct care workers. Grants could also be used for recruitment and retention strategies, workforce training, education initiatives, and career ladder programs.

In addition to the Education and Labor proposal, the House Ways and Means Committee also proposed 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave, \$400 million for nursing home workforce development, elder justice, and adult protective services. It also includes proposals to expand Medicare services to include dental, vision, and hearing services.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee proposals include substantial funding for health care programs including \$190 billion to expand access to HCBS services and workforce, expanded eligibility for coverage subsidies and reduced cost-sharing under the Affordable Care Act, **creation of a new “federal Medicaid program” for states that have not opted into the ACA’s Medicaid expansion for childless adults, and two proposals to revise the Medicare program to include prescription drug negotiations and increased benefits, adding vision, hearing, and dental benefits.**

Next Steps

Leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives established a September 15th deadline for each committee to finalize their respective portions of the reconciliation legislation. The full House hoped to pass the final bill by the end of September, but there has been significant push back from the Senate on the size and scope of the legislation, which is being revised.

The legislation will then move to the Senate, where there remains uncertainty about the outcome of the bill. The Senate must adhere to the “Byrd Rule” which limits the scope of reconciliation legislation only to provisions that are primarily related to revenue and spending. Given that all 50 Democratic Senators must vote in favor of the bill for it to pass, total funding levels will need to be reduced. These negotiations are ongoing.

(Acknowledgements: This update includes excerpts and data from USAging's Legislative Update dated 9/10/21 and ADvancing States' memo dated 9/13/21.)