U.S. Lawmakers Budget More Money for HIV and Health Care in 2020

Funding bills in the House prioritize Ryan White efforts, the Office of AIDS Research, opioid programs and more.

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It seems that legislators, especially in the House, remain committed to completing all spending bills for the 2020 fiscal year (FY20) ahead of their September 30 deadline. House lawmakers are considering a “minibus” that includes funding for State and Foreign Operations; Defense; Energy and Water; and Labor, Health and Human Services, Education (L-HHS), which covers most funding for domestic HIV care and prevention programs.

Representatives debated and finalized the L-HHS portion of the enormous joint spending bill last week; it proposes elevated spending for health care programs across the board and incorporates the Administration’s Ending the Epidemic: A Plan for America, reflected in increases for many HIV-specific programs, including a $116 million increase to the Ryan White Program, as well as an additional $155 million to the NIH Office of AIDS Research, among other public health and HIV-specific increases.

Lawmakers also included a number of harm reduction-related funding priorities in the amendments debated last week, including fully funding Sec. 7081 of the SUPPORT Act, which would create a coordinated care model for overdose patients who present in the emergency room, and increasing allocations for the Substance Abuse Treatment program by $1,000,000. In addition, the House has instructed HHS to prioritize funding for Medication Assisted Treatment, the evidence-based “gold standard” for substance use disorder treatment.

During the consideration of amendments to the Labor-HHS appropriations bill last week, 2 addition funding measures concerning people living with HIV were passed and will be included in the final bill. The first, authored by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14), would increase funding for the CDC’s opioid and infectious disease program by $15 million, while the second, submitted by Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (D-FL-26) would increase funding for the Minority AIDS Initiative Fund by $5 million.

The next set of funding bills to be addressed in the House will include Agriculture; Commerce-Justice-Science; Interior-Environment; Military Construction-VA; and Transportation-HUD spending, a significant bill for the HIV community because of the inclusion of the Housing Opportunities for

People with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA) program.

While the House continues to churn out funding bills on-schedule, Senate Republican leadership is still in discussions with the White House regarding top-level spending levels before considering any individual bills or minibuses. Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL) says they are “close to the same page” and will continue talks. Senator Shelby had earlier opened the possibility of simply “deeming” — that is, creating a working assumption of — a top-line budget cap and settling on a final number later in negotiations with the House. Time will tell if legislators will come to an agreement with the White House or their House counterparts first.

Check back with AIDS United’s Policy Update regularly for all the latest on federal spending and policy impacting people living with, affected by, and vulnerable to HIV.

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