

DC Update

July 23, 2008

Congress continues to work on numerous issues before the upcoming August recess. However, the usual summer appropriations work has stalled in the House. Both chambers admit that a continuing resolution (CR) will be likely and that they will finish FY 2009 appropriations early next year under a new Administration. Additionally, a second economic stimulus package is expected to be rolled out. It is unlikely the package will reach the floor in the House or Senate before September; however leadership has shown commitment to continuing discussions. NACBHDD is watching this and will report on inclusion of any provisions for temporary federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) increase for Medicaid and the August 17 SCHIP directive action.

Housing

On July 23, 2008 the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 3221, the *Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008*, by a margin of 272-152. The Senate is currently taking up the measure and is expected to hold a final vote on Saturday. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) indicated to that the Senate would work through the weekend, if needed, to complete action on this measure. Though President Bush had signaled he would veto the legislation, mid-week the Administration rescinded the threat and encouraged Congress to pass the bill and send it to his desk for signature. The measure was created to primarily address reform of government sponsored enterprises (GSEs) Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and to create a new refinancing program within the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to help homeowners facing foreclosure.

Also included in the large aid package are Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to allow localities to purchase abandoned and foreclosed homes and residential property. Additionally, a National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) is created funded initially by government sponsored enterprises Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, but in the future other sources may be developed. The trust fund creates capitol for low income supprotive housing. NACBHDD will keep members updated on this activity.

ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008

The Senate has moved a bit on ADAAA in recent weeks. NACBHDD has signed onto to a support letter encouraging the Senate to take up the measure that has already passed the House (402-17). Last week the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a roundtable to discuss the current legislation. The HELP Committee will continue to meet to resolve any conflicts regarding the negotiated deal between the business and disability communities. The legislation may see floor action in September.

Mental Health and Addictions Parity

The mental health and addiction parity compromise bill that was agreed to by House and Senate negotiators is included in the *Jobs, Energy, Families and Disaster Relief Act of 2008* (S. 3335), which is expected to be considered on the Senate floor the week of July 28th. In June, the Senate failed to invoke cloture on a tax extenders package by 7 votes. To keep that from happening again, grassroots are encouraged to contact their senators. It is essential the Senate pass this package before the August recess so that parity legislation can also pass the House and be signed into law by the President before Congress adjourns for the year in September.

To take action on this measure, call your U.S. Senators by using the toll-free Parity Hotline: 1-866-parity4 (1-866-727-4894). (The Parity Hotline reaches the U.S. Capitol switchboard, which can connect you to the offices of your members).

Advancing America's Priorities Act

On July 22, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced S. 3297, *Advancing America's Priorities Act*. The package contains a large number of bills that passed the House, have bi-partisan support and moved out of Senate committees. However, they have been stalled in the Senate due to holds placed on the bills by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK).

Included in the package is reauthorization of the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) and the Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act. MIOTCRA provides grants to plan and implement diversion activities for communities and the MOTHERS Act includes education, screening, services and research for postpartum depression. We encourage you to contact your Senators and urge them to support S. 3297, particularly the inclusion of the two pieces of legislation mentioned.

Healthy Transitions Act, H.R. 6375/S. 3195

On Friday, a bi-partisan group of members held a briefing regarding a recently released GAO report addressing transition youth with serious mental illness. Senators Gordon Smith (R-OR) and Chris Dodd (D-CT), Representatives Pete Stark (D-CA), Dave Camp (R-MI) and Mary Bono Mack (R-CA) sponsored the event with researchers from the recently released GAO report addressing transition youth with serious mental illness along with other panel members representing transition age consumers, state government, providers and child welfare.

The bill, H.R. 6375 and S.3195 will provide authorization for planning and implementation grants to address transition age youth issues with serious mental health disorders. Additionally, a committee of federal partners will coordinate service programs, provide technical assistance and report to Congress on their activities.

To view the GAO report please click the following link:
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08678.pdf>