

Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

April 29, 2015

FY 2016 APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Last week, House and Senate conferees began meeting to work out differences between their respective versions of the FY 2016 Budget Resolution. As previously discussed, the Budget Resolution sets the broad parameters for Federal spending, both in terms of the current year appropriations process and as a blueprint for long-term spending. While it appears that a consensus is within reach, it will not be bipartisan, and at this point actual FY 2016 funding levels will still be determined under the constraints of sequester-level spending caps. There is already talk of the need for a bipartisan budget deal to lift the caps similar to the one negotiated in December, 2013, and President Obama has indicated that he will veto any funding bill that adhere to the sequestration limits.

Meanwhile, the annual appropriations process itself is continuing to move forward. As the various Appropriations Subcommittees are wrapping up their hearings in anticipation of drafting the FY 2016 spending bills, we have reiterated the County's funding priorities to each of the relevant subcommittees. Last week, the *FY 2016 Energy and Water Appropriations* bill became the first measure to be reported out by the full House Appropriations Committee, and is scheduled to be considered on the House floor shortly. The House Transportation and HUD Appropriations Subcommittee is scheduled to begin work on its FY 2016 spending bill this week, and it could be considered at the full committee level the first week in May. Other subcommittees are expected to follow suit in the coming weeks. While this is the earliest that bills have been drafted in several years, the current caps will make it more difficult to draft each subsequent bill unless they are lifted or somehow adjusted.

HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION

As Congress returned from its recess, we urged Senate leadership to take action on H.R.

2, the *Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015*, to replace the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) as the basis for physician reimbursement rates under the Medicare program and reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through September 2017. In addition, the legislation extends the current authorization for Federal Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) for an additional two years. We also asked Senators Boxer and Feinstein to support the measure, emphasizing the significance of these provisions, including the provision of comprehensive Medi-Cal coverage to over 11,000 children in the County under CHIP. H.R. 2 had been overwhelmingly approved by the House on March 26, and last week the Senate approved the bill by a vote of 92-8, with Senators Boxer and Feinstein voting in its favor. President Obama signed it into law on April 16.

ELDER ABUSE

We contacted the four House committees of jurisdiction to advocate in support of reauthorization of the Elder Justice Act. Congressman King (R-NY) has introduced H.R. 988, the *Elder Justice Reauthorization Act*, which would provide a simple reauthorization of the Act through 2019. However, we urged the committees to include provisions to improve the capacity of local adult protective services (APS) programs to respond effectively to abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults, citing the increase in both the elderly population and elder abuse related incidences in the County. We also asked Congresswoman Capps to support reauthorization of the Act. Hearings have not yet been scheduled.

MUNI BOND TAX EXEMPTION REPEAL

In response to an Action Alert from NACo, we contacted Congresswoman Capps and other members of the California House delegation to make them aware of a "Dear Colleague" letter being circulated in support of maintaining the tax exempt status of municipal bonds. The

President's FY 2016 Budget Request proposed capping the exemption at 28%, and other proposals being circulated would eliminate it altogether. We also contacted the House and Senate committees of jurisdiction to express support for tax-exempt municipal bonds. However, it is unclear at this point whether Congress will actually tackle tax reform this year.

HOUSING/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Donovan recently announced formula allocations for community planning and development programs, based on enactment of the FY 2015 budget levels. We have been informed that the County will receive \$1,584,252 in CDBG funding, and \$701,737 under the HOME program.

HUD also announced that it was awarding nearly \$36 million in grants under the Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency Services Coordinators (ROSS-SC) Program to public housing authorities and non-profit organizations across the nation to hire or retain service coordinators to help residents achieve economic and housing independence. We were informed that an award of \$246,000 has been made for service coordinators in Santa Barbara County.

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