



CWDA

Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of All Californians

Federal Update Congress Returns

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TO: County Welfare Directors Association

FROM: Tom Joseph, Director, CWDA Washington, D.C. Office

DATE: September 6, 2016

RE: Federal Update

Congress returns today for an abbreviated fall schedule. They must pass an extension of federal funding before the federal fiscal year (FFY) ends on September 30. That measure will likely contain current level funding of all programs until sometime in December, leaving a lame duck session of Congress to finalize FFY 2017 spending. The short-term spending bill will also include extensions of programs otherwise expiring, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Family First Prevention Services Act: Over the summer recess, Senate Finance Committee staff held a number of calls with CWDA and the California Department of Social Services. Those conversations included a lengthy call with CWDA and the chief Democratic sponsor, Senate Finance Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR). Despite a number of significant concerns voiced by CWDA and the state, Senate staff continue to assert that there is no opportunity to amend the legislation, arguing that there is not enough time to consider amendments and the Congressional Budget Office would not be able to estimate the costs of any amendments in a timely manner. Senate Finance staff continue to assert that California's concerns could be resolved through Senate floor colloquies which are statements of the bill authors addressing what they intended in parts of the bill which are not clear. They also assert that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would be able to issue administrative guidance favorable to California's concerns. And, if issues remain requiring legislative action, they promise that a future Congress would fix any outstanding issues.

For their part, HHS's Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) have been very aggressive in supporting the bill, despite no official Statement of Administration Policy. ACYF staff were in California late last month urging stakeholders to support the bill. They met with CWDA and child advocacy organizations and, in language much harsher

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than what is written here, argued that California's foster care system is failing many of the children it is supposed to protect.

In late July CWDA, California DSS, child advocacy organizations and New York State offered a limited set of amendments that kept to the intent of the bill but more closely aligned Family First to some key state and county programs meeting the same goals. To date, the Senate has rejected any attempt to amend the bill and there appears to be no path forward that will assure California that the Senate will address legislatively any of the prevention and group home requirement issues. Senate staff also argue that extensions of existing child welfare programs included in the bill are at risk of elimination if the measure is not passed by October 1, 2016, despite the fact that Congress always finds legislative vehicles to extend such programs.

In August, CWDA, the John Burton Foundation, CDSS, the Alliance for Children's Rights and Social Change Partners held very well-attended webinar outlining the problems with the bill. The State of New York also held a similar webinar. And, Casey Family Programs has conducted a number of regional convenings that were very supportive of the Family First Act.

For their part, the National Association of Counties (NACo) adopted a resolution sponsored by CWDA and Los Angeles County urging the Senate to consider amendments to the bill. House and Senate staff requested and held a conference call with NACo in August urging support for the measure. Senate majority staff proclaimed that if the bill was not adopted, there would not be an opportunity to do so for perhaps a generation and that NACo should consider their position carefully.

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) staff have indicated that the Association will not be sending any more letters on the bill, that the earlier ones sent previously stand.

Also in August, the Pennsylvania county association sent a letter opposing the bill, but the North Carolina social services directors association reversed its position and now supports the measure.

As the Senate re-convenes, the unnamed Senators who placed a legislative hold on the bill before the summer recess will be under intense political pressure to withdraw their hold and allow the bill to pass by voice vote. The Washington Post today published an Op-ed by the chief Republican and Democratic authors in both the House and Senate urging quick legislative action. If the bill is adopted, it would be sent to President Obama who will sign the measure.

Improved Employment Outcomes for Foster Youth Act: Today, CWDA sent a letter supporting the introduction of a bipartisan bill which would make transition age foster youth a target group under the employer Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) in order to

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help expand employment opportunities for them. Such a measure would be attached to a tax bill which is not expected until perhaps next session.

This federal budget update was created by CWDA Staff. Direct questions to the contact at right.

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