



WASHINGTON UPDATE

SUMMER 2015

Katz Policy Lecture



Kali Thomas, PhD, of Brown University will deliver the 9th Katz Policy Lecture on October 14, 2015

at 3pm at Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging. Dr. Thomas will share the results of her research on the impact of Meals on Wheels programs on individuals and states.

The Katz Policy Lecture is held annually in honor and memory of the late Dr. Sidney Katz, who was Distinguished Scholar at Benjamin Rose.

More information and registration will be available soon at benrose.org/education.

Summer Solstice

Congress is not in session, and won't be again until sometime after Labor Day. The Congressional recess gives advocates some time to see their members in their home district, often at "listening" events or other public events in the area.

It also gives advocates an opportunity to think through what they want to say to their elected representatives. After all, knowing what to say is made a little bit more effective by knowing a little more about what is going on. The procedures in Congress for moving along legislation and budgets are complicated, and there are many of them. In addition, Congress has broken the assignments for different kinds of legislation in ways that might not make sense to the "non-expert." This makes it easy for Members of Congress to simply "blame the system" and avoid giving you specific commitments to advance matters that are important to you.

Going forward, we at Benjamin Rose, with the help of our partners at Matz Blancato in Washington, are going to attempt to give you more background and specifics on where things stand and where they have to go next to advance various matters we advocate for, and hope you will too. This month, we will address two questions:

1. Why is it so important to avoid sequestration?
2. What has to happen next to move the Older Americans Act Forward?

Future Washington Updates will include background information on other issues, status updates on legislation, and when appropriate, calls to action.

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Contact Us

We welcome your feedback!
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Why Is It So Important to Avoid Sequestration?

In 2011, Congress passed the Budget Control Act, which was a bargain to raise the debt ceiling. The tradeoff for raising the debt ceiling at that time was to cut the federal budget by \$917 billion over the next 10 years. These cuts are known as "sequestration cuts." In FY 2013, when the first cuts took effect at an average of 5% across-the-board, aging services programs saw devastating results: waiting lists, cutbacks, layoffs, and even site closures. A budget agreement was brokered by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) to postpone sequestration during FY 2014 and FY 2015. However, sequestration is set to come back in October for FY 2016 if no agreement is reached again, and it will last until 2023.

In the FY 2016 proposed budgets from the Senate and the House, some aging services programs are level-funded, but some receive sharp cuts, including the SHIPs (State Health Insurance Assistance Programs), which are cut from \$52 million to \$30 million. However, the level funding that the majority of programs are receiving is level funding from the FY 2013 levels, meaning that these programs have never recovered from the initial sequester cuts. And, if sequestration continues, this funding could be cut even further at a time of huge growth in our older adult population. To avoid sequestration for FY 2016, Congress needs to reach another budget agreement like the Murray-Ryan agreement. However, the Murray-Ryan agreement only postponed sequestration. To avoid sequestration permanently, Congress needs to repeal the Budget Control Act.

What has to Happen Next to Move the Older Americans Act Forward?

As you know, the Senate passed S.192, the bipartisan Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, last month. What happens next to move this reauthorization forward?

The House must vote on an OAA reauthorization. To date, no reauthorization bill has been introduced in the House. So, the very next step is to get a House Member to introduce a reauthorization bill. This can be done by any House Member. For example, Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Richard Hanna (R-NY), and the leadership of the Education and the Workforce Committee (Reps. John Kline (R-MN) and Bobby Scott (D-VA)) have all discussed introducing reauthorization bills.

The introduced bill must then be referred to the Education and the Workforce Committee, where it may be voted on first by the Higher Education and Workforce Training Subcommittee before a full vote in the Committee. Then after it passes the full Committee, the bill is placed on the House calendar, where it waits until it is called for a vote among the full House. If the bill the House passes is different than the Senate version, the two bills must be "conferenced," or reconciled, and both chambers must revote on the reconciled bill. Then and only then can it be signed into law.

In other words, we still have a long way to go!