



WASHINGTON UPDATE

February 2014

Washington Update: Inaugural Issue

Throughout our 106-year history, the Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging has advocated on behalf of older adults. Advocacy for older people at the state and community level is bolstered by a current understanding of developments in Washington.

Our colleagues at Matz, Blancato and Associates are tracking legislative and executive branch developments that will have an impact on community-based supports for older people, and we will be sharing summaries with you. From time to time, we will add our own commentary as well.

We welcome your feedback! Please share questions, suggestions or concerns.

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Congressional Update

Accomplishments Made

Since the beginning of the second session of the 113th Congress, several important bills have been considered, including the omnibus spending bill, which sets the budget of many federal agencies, and the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill compromise passed the House on January 30 and passed the Senate on February 4. It now goes to the President for signature. The bill cuts SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) benefits by \$8 billion over 10 years, which is far less than the House had originally proposed - \$39 billion in cuts. Provisions benefiting seniors in the Farm Bill include the reauthorization of the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program and making the Commodity Supplemental Nutrition Program a seniors-only program. The bill also would allow grocery delivery services to accept SNAP benefits when they serve seniors and people with disabilities.

The agreement leading to the omnibus spending bill was worked out in December, and legislators spent the holidays crafting spending bills for all areas of the federal government. The spending bill passed by a wide bipartisan margin in both chambers of Congress. The omnibus spending bill represents an end to sequestration for some programs, including senior nutrition programs under the Older Americans Act, and funds the government through September 30.

A Busy Session Ahead

Looking ahead, Congress will have to act to permanently fix the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula "patch" for doctors' Medicare reimbursements. The patch delays

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a 24% cut for three months to these reimbursements dating from the passage of the budget funding level in December, but legislators are working out a deal for full repeal of the SGR formula cuts. Bills for full repeal have been voted out of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee.

Other issues expected to get some level of attention in 2014 include immigration reform, further oversight and possible legislation related to the Affordable Care Act, follow up to the report filed by the bipartisan Long Term Care Commission, and further work on the Elder Justice Act, for which authorization expires at the end of this fiscal year on September 30. One final issue which could get attention will be whether a White House Conference on Aging will be held as scheduled in 2015.

Aging Policy: Older Americans Act Reauthorization in Motion

S.1028, The Older Americans Act Amendments of 2013, passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee on October 30, 2013. A working group has been established to work out differences, mainly over issues related to the funding formula. Once the working group has finished, the bill will move to the full Senate for consideration. According to Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), chairman of the Primary Health and Aging Subcommittee of the HELP Committee, he is hopeful that the bill will be considered early this year and he says that the bill has support among the Senate leadership.

H.R. 3850, The Older Americans Act Reauthorization of 2013, has been introduced in the House by Reps. Chris Gibson (R-NY), Tom Reed (R-NY), and Betty McCollum (D-MN). It would reauthorize the OAA for five years and be a "straight reauthorization," making no changes to the Act. A hearing may be held in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on the OAA this month.

If you'd like to read summary information or the complete bills presented in the House and Senate, enter the bill number in the search box at <http://beta.congress.gov>.

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