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President Signs Spending Bill

On March 11, President Obama signed the "Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009" into law (P.L.111-8). The new law consolidates nine spending bills for fiscal year (FY) 2009. It provides \$410 billion in total discretionary funding for the remainder of FY 2009, \$31 billion more than the FY 2008. This includes funding for many housing, health, hunger, education, and social service programs.

After a contentious debate surrounding amendments and earmarks, the U.S. Senate passed by a vote of 62 to 35 the omnibus spending bill (H.R. 1105) on March 10. The House voted for passage of the legislation last month.

Below are some highlights of the spending proposal that passed both the House and Senate.

Agriculture

- The Women, Infants, and Children Program: Funded at \$6.9 billion, a \$1.2 billion increase.
- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program: Funded at \$160.4 million, \$20.7 million above the FY 2008 funding level. This program provides nutritious food packages for low-income seniors, mothers, and children.
- Rural Development: Funded at \$2.7 billion. USDA rural development programs include funding for rural housing and economic development.

Commerce, Justice, State, and Judiciary (CJSJ)

- Office of Justice Programs: Received \$2 billion in funding, a \$321 million increase. The OJP provides funding to state and local governments for prevention and intervention programs.
- Office of Violence Against Women: Funded at \$415 million, \$15 million above the 2008 spending level.

Labor HHS

- Community Health Centers: Received \$2.2 billion in funding, a slight increase from the 2008 spending level. It is estimated that this \$125 million increase would provide 470,000 uninsured people with access to community health centers.
- State Health Access Grants: Provided \$75 million in funding for a new initiative to provide start up grants to states with plans to expand health care coverage to targeted groups.
- Rural Health: Received \$289 million in funding, \$27 million above FY 2008 spending levels.
- Head Start Program: Funded at \$7.1 billion, \$235 million more than FY 2008.
- Child Care Assistance: Funded at \$2.1 billion, a \$65 million increase. It is estimated that this increase will provide child care assistance for an additional 11,000 children.
- After-School programs: Funded at \$1.1 billion, a \$50 million increase.
- Dislocated Workers: Received \$1.5 billion in funding, a slight increase to assist workers who have lost their jobs.
- Employment Service: Funded at \$704 million to assist people with their job search.
- Community Services Block Grant: Received \$700 million in funding, \$46 million more than FY 2008. The Community Services Block Grant assists states with providing employment, housing, and emergency services to low-income people.
- Senior Nutrition: Funded at \$810 million, a \$52 million increase.

For more information, please contact Lucreda Cobbs, Senior Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement, lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Congress Reviews President's Budget Request

On February 26, President Obama released his FY 2010 budget request outlining the administration's priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. This week, representatives from the administration went before Congress to defend and explain the proposals and spending requests that were outlined in the budget. This is the second step in the annual budget process where department heads testify before various Congressional committees to promote the administration's proposals.

Officials appearing before Congress included a March 10 appearance by Peter Orszag, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, before the Senate Finance Committee. Mr. Orszag outlined the administration's plan to reform the health care system and explained how the administration plans to control cost while providing coverage for millions of Americans. On March 12, Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, appeared before the House Budget Committee to defend the administration's proposals for education reform. His testimony included an explanation of the department's plans to transform the Pell Grant program into a mandatory program, as well as plans to increase grant amount. The dialogue with Committee members included a discussion of voucher programs and the department's plans for No Child Left Behind.

The Congress will continue to hold hearings on the budget request during the upcoming weeks as both chambers move forward on developing a budget resolution for FY2010.

For more information, please contact Desmond Brown, Senior Director of Government Affairs, dbrown@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Congress Moves Community Service Legislation

On March 11, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor approved legislation to expand national volunteer service programs by a vote of 34 to 3. The “Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act” (H.R. 1388) would

- Grow the number of AmeriCorps volunteers from 75,000 to 250,000
- Increase the education reward to \$5350
- Provide incentives for middle and high school students to engage in service
- Recognize and support universities engaged in service
- Create green and other new service corps to meet key needs in low-income communities
- Expand service opportunities for older Americans and public-private partnerships
- Build a nationwide service infrastructure through community-building investments and social entrepreneurship
- Establish call to service campaigns

The full House may consider the legislation as early as next week. To read more, [go here](http://edlabor.house.gov/newsroom/2009/03/house-education-committee-over.shtml).
[<http://edlabor.house.gov/newsroom/2009/03/house-education-committee-over.shtml>]

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions held a hearing on March 10 to consider a similar bill, the “Serve America Act” (S. 277). This legislation would reauthorize and expand the “National and Community Service Act of 1990.” The Committee is expected to vote on the bill next week, with the goal for the full Senate to pass it before the spring recess. To learn more about the hearing, [go here](http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2009_03_10_b/2009_03_10_b.html).
[http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2009_03_10_b/2009_03_10_b.html]

Catholic Charities USA will keep you updated on this legislation.

For more information, please contact Kellyann McClain, Policy Analyst,
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Senate Continues Discussions on Foreclosure Bill

Last week, Senate leaders continued discussions on its version of a foreclosure bill to help homeowners at risk of losing their homes. Leaders have not been able to reach an agreement or identify the 60 votes necessary to move the measure. Much of the debate has focused on a provision that would allow bankruptcy judges to modify the principal owed on the mortgage of a primary residence. Passage of a foreclosure bill in the Senate also faces a number of scheduling challenges including the FY 2010 budget debate and the upcoming spring recess. On March 5, a similar foreclosure measure, H.R. 1106, passed the House after leaders were able to iron out a compromise on the bankruptcy provision.

For more information, please contact Desmond Brown, Senior Director of Government Affairs,
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Special Announcement Regarding Justice for Immigrants Regional Training

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Justice for Immigrants (JFI) campaign will conduct a training in the Cincinnati area on March 26-28, 2009. The purpose of the training is to convene supporters of comprehensive immigration reform (CIR) in Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Michigan, strengthen and grow the support base for immigration reform, and arm supporters with updated messages and educational pieces to continue to push for CIR.

JFI has identified Ohio and the surrounding states as prime areas of opportunity to move large numbers of Catholics and Catholic federal lawmakers to support CIR.

Event information, including the agenda, may be [found here](#).
[<http://guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Summary.aspx?e=2f041b23-ed4b-4f43-9c78-63424b863ea2>].

A limited number of scholarships are available, and anyone interested in a scholarship should call 202-541-3165 to apply for one. Questions about the convening may also be directed to the same telephone number.

Please consider attending the training and/or sharing this information with your networks.

For more information, please contact Lucreda Cobbs, Senior Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement, lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org.

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