**Policy/Advocacy Update – 4/5/2017**

**Federal Legislation Update:**

**FY2017 Appropriations – Continuing Resolution (CR) –**Congress passed a short-term CR on 12/9, signed by the President on 12/10. **The CR maintains the FY17 spending cap of $1.07 trillion and keeps the federal government funded through April 28, 2017**. To fit under mandated spending caps, the CR includes an across-the-board cut of 0.19% to funding levels for defense and non-defense programs. Now lawmakers must negotiate another budget deal - either a full-year CR or final spending bills - to keep the government operating until 9/30/17. Some conservative members of Congress are urging their leadership to enact cuts to federal spending levels in any final bill.

**Every State Will Likely Lose Housing Vouchers If Congress Doesn’t Boost Funding for 2017 –** Under a continuing resolution that freezes voucher funding for all of 2017 at last year’s level, for example, vouchers for more than 100,000 families would be unfunded, a loss of assistance that would be greater than what the 2013 sequestration cuts caused.

**Impact of Fiscal Year 2017 Funding Proposals on the Number of Households Using Housing Vouchers, completed by CBPP:**

| **State** | **Number of households using housing vouchers, 2016** | **Number of housing vouchers cut under Senate bill, 2017** | **Number of housing vouchers cut under continuing resolution for 2017\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ME** | **11,818** | **-142** | **-579** |

**HUD Funding Prospects (from CBPP):** On 3/8 the House of Representatives took what is hopefully a major step toward enacting a final fiscal year 2017 funding bill for HUD and other agencies.  The House-passed Defense appropriations bill now goes to the Senate, where it is likely to be transformed into an omnibus funding bill that includes the remaining federal agencies.  Word is the Senate will endeavor to pass such an omnibus bill before April 7, when Congress will adjourn for two weeks.  The current Continuing Resolution expires April 28, leaving little time for the House and Senate to come to agreement.

**President Trump’s proposed budget (from CBPP)**: President Trump released his “skinny” budget on 3/16 – a budget blueprint for FY 18 (the full budget will likely be submitted to Congress in May). The President’s FY 18 budget blueprint includes a $6.2 billion—or 13.2%—cut to HUD programs compared to FY16 to help offset a $54 billion increase to defense spending. Specifically, the HUD budget:

* Eliminates CDBG, HOME and Choice Neighborhoods.

According to CBPP, the budget says the federal government will continue to help 4.5 million households pay the rent, but it provides no details on funding for HUD’s rental assistance programs, which helped nearly 4.9 million households in 2016. But preliminary budget documents leaked the week of 3/6 indicate that the President’s proposals in the full budget request will likely include significant rental assistance cuts, including:

* Public housing cut by $2 billion, or 30%.
* Housing Choice Vouchers would be funded at $19.3 billion, about $300 million below the 2016 level, and about $1.7 billion below the amount estimated to be required to renew all vouchers in 2018. This is equal to 200,000 vouchers being lost.
* Cuts that would result in about 25,000 homes for seniors and people with disabilities being lost.

**Effect of the President’s FY 18 HUD budget cuts on Maine (per CBPP analysis):**

| **State** | **Vouchers Cut** | **Public Housing Funding Cut** | **CDBG Funding Cut** | **HOME Funding Cut** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ME** | **-1,071** | **-$6,290,625** | **-$16,494,704** | **-$4,303,357** |

The NLIHC has a national sign-on letter, asking Congress to lift harmful spending caps and to fully fund affordable housing programs. You can sign the letter here**:** <https://nlihc.wufoo.com/forms/urge-congress-lift-spending-caps-fund-thud-bill/>

**National Housing Trust Fund:**  With President Trump’s proposed cuts to NDD programs, and the potential effect on housing programs (see above), funding for the HTF could face significant budget cuts and other threats this year. In the past, Congress has proposed to gut the HTF and to use its funding to fill holes in the HUD budget. Congress must instead ensure that all affordable housing programs—including the HTF—are fully funded. The HTF is the only federal program designed to build and preserve housing affordable to people with the lowest incomes. We must ensure that the program is protected – not eliminated.

**The Affordable Care Act (ACA):** The House Republican health plan unveiled on 3/6, was pulled from the House floor and will not be considered in its current state.

***NEW –* S. 743: A Bill to Strengthen the United Stated Interagency Council on Homelessness:** Senators Collins and Reed introduced legislation on 3/28 to strengthen and eliminate the sunset for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Referred to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

**Senate Democrats Unveil Comprehensive Infrastructure Plan, Affordable Housing Included:** Senate Democrats unveiled their infrastructure plan: A Blueprint to Rebuild America’s Infrastructure. The $1 trillion plan aims to create over 15 million jobs, and addresses issues including broadband internet, downtown revitalization, water and sewer, schools, roads and bridges, and also includes investments for public and affordable housing.

***NEW –* H.R. 161: Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act. – Sponsored by Representative Hastings (Florida).** This bill would amend the Public Health Service Act to establish a grant program to provide supportive services in permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals and families, and for other purposes. Referred to the House Energy and Commerce committee.

**H.R. 948: The Common Sense Housing Investment Act, to help end homelessness and housing poverty through comprehensive tax reform. – Referred to House Ways and Means, Financial Services committee*.*** According to the NLIHC the [*Common Sense Housing Investment Act*](http://cqrcengage.com/nlihc/app/thru?ep=AAAAC2Flc0NpcGhlcjAxBuGrlqP3Tp_K3rEdOWjgZeJ_hryGlWg6W1-Ie7x-bYwgcrCzEvvjb3EyWJGKtkq4DRQja4hjOcWqz23UlCVubtpNTPbYa70emTvSF167-1pXOTkBF64RLMTUxap557_93WQOGSGjLVaPdtfEZaxL3FiKksM3qt8yiGwSRimIg3UbuvAzrzb7xo0bboFv55pXZbMPQ9mQpjGZJEkn-8nCj9CVpJTW5ZcspS596EsAZ6s&lp=0) calls for modest reforms to the mortgage interest deduction, a $70 billion tax write-off that largely benefits America's highest-income households, and reinvests the significant savings into providing affordable housing for people with the greatest needs. The bill would boost funding for the Housing Trust Fund, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, public housing, and rental assistance solutions-without adding any costs to the federal government. The reforms are simple and bipartisan. First, the bill reduces the size of a mortgage eligible for the tax break from $1 million to the first $500,000-impacting fewer than 6% of homeowners. Second, the bill converts the mortgage interest deduction into a tax credit. This would allow 15 million more low and moderate income homeowners who currently do not benefit from the mortgage interest deduction to get a much-needed tax break. The United for Homes campaign-including more than 2,300 national, state, and local organizations and elected officials in all 435 congressional districts-strongly endorses H.R 948.

**H.R. 6378: To amend the Public Health Service Act to revise the amount of minimum allotments under the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness Program. *– No new action/update.*** Sponsor: Rep. Peter Welch [D-VT], co-sponsor Rep. Cramer, Kevin [R-ND].

**H.R. 4888: Ending Homelessness Act of 2016** – ***No new action/update.***Introduced on 3/23 by House Financial Services Committee Ranking Member Maxine Waters (D-CA).

**S.993/H.R.1854, The Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act – *No new action/update.*** Introduced by Senators Franken (D-MN) - Cornyn (R-TX) and Representatives Collins (R-GA)-Scott (D-VA).

**State Legislation Update:**

* **Governor LePage released his 2017-2018 Biennial Budget late on Friday, January 6, 2016**. **The budget targets many areas of DHHS’ spending, with a stated goal of “stabilizing DHHS.” – *Public hearings on the biennial budget will be held between 2/6 and 3/8. The full Biennial Budget schedule can be found online:*** [***http://legislature.maine.gov/uploads/originals/detailed-biennial-ph-schedule-blocks.pdf***](http://legislature.maine.gov/uploads/originals/detailed-biennial-ph-schedule-blocks.pdf)

**Areas of interest include:**

* + Eliminating eligibility of "able-bodied parents" with earnings over 40% of the Federal Poverty Level from Medicaid. – The Public Hearing for this portion was held on 2/21; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. – **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative; the minority voted of the Committee voted the initiative as proposed.**
	+ Eliminating eligibility of 19 & 20 year-olds from MaineCare. – The Public Hearing for this portion of the budget was held on 2/21; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative; the minority voted of the Committee voted the initiative as proposed but with the recognition that the department needs to submit language to accompany this initiative.**
	+ Eliminating the General Assistance Program. (Part ZZZ). The Public Hearing for this portion of the budget was held on 2/22; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative (as well as the initiative that would eliminate the program for non-citizens, part HHHH); the minority voted of the Committee voted for both sets of initiatives as proposed.**
		- **General Assistance Minority vote:** Six members of the HHS Committee voted to include additional changes to the General Assistance program. This minority initiative would do the following: (1) eliminate GA for an individual that has timed off of TANF until a period of 5 years has passed and (2) make an applicant for GA who voluntarily abandons or refuses to use an available resource without just cause ineligible for 120 days from the date of abandoning the resource.
	+ Reducing the maximum lifetime cap for TANF, from 60 to 36 months. (PART FFFF). The Public Hearing for this portion of the budget was held on 2/22; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative, as well as the initiative to eliminate coverage for individuals with drug felony convictions (Part EEEE) removing most good cause exemptions; the minority voted of the Committee voted for Part FFFF as proposed, but amended Part EEEE to allow an individual to qualify for TANF after a period of 10 years has passed since the completion of incarceration for a drug felony conviction.**
	+ Repealing the provision that requires DHHS to provide a food supplement program for non-citizens, who would otherwise be eligible for SNAP benefits but for their immigration status. (Part KKKK). The Public Hearing for this portion of the budget is 2/22; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative; the minority voted of the Committee voted the initiative as proposed.**
	+ Repealing the provision that requires DHHS to provide supplemental security income for non-citizens, who would otherwise be eligible for Supplemental Security Income but for their immigration status. (Part KKKK). The Public Hearing for this portion of the budget was held on 2/22; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative; the minority voted of the Committee voted the initiative as proposed.**
	+ Repealing the provision that requires DHHS to provide a financial assistance to non-citizens, who would otherwise be eligible for TANF benefits but for their immigration status. (Part KKKK). The Public Hearing for this portion of the budget was held on 2/22; budget block work sessions began the week of 2/27. **Summarized in its memo to the AFA Committee, the HHS Committee voted 7-6 against this initiative; the minority voted of the Committee voted the initiative as proposed.**
	+ Full funding for the HOME Fund – Following a joint hearing with the Appropriations Committee, the Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development (LCRED) Committee voted unanimously to support full funding for the HOME Fund in the coming biennium. If this proposal is ultimately adopted, it will likely lead to the Fund’s highest level of funding in decades.

Bills of note:

* **LD 136**, **An Act Regarding the Eviction Process**, sponsored by Sen. Scott Cyrway (R-Kennebec), would expand the causes for a 7-day notice of termination of tenancy listed in 14 MRSA §6002 to include the following three additional reasons:
	+ The tenant or the tenant's guest or invitee is the perpetrator of violence, a threat of violence or sexual assault against another tenant, a tenant's guest, the landlord or the landlord's employee or agent;
	+ The person occupying the premises is not an authorized occupant of the premises; or
	+ The tenant provided false information on the tenant's rental application.
* **LD 33**, **An Act To Adjust the Lifetime Limit for the Receipt of TANF Benefits**, sponsored by Sen. Eric Brakey (R-Androscoggin), would change the lifetime limit on receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits from 60 months to 36 months.
* **LD 36**, **An Act To Create a 9-month Time Limit on General Assistance Benefits for Certain Persons**, also sponsored by Sen. Brakey, would limit the general assistance benefits for a person without dependents and who is capable of working to a maximum of 275 days every 5 years.  **Public hearing: 4/10 at 9:00 am in front of the HHS Committee (Cross Building, Room 209).**
* ***NEW –* LD 10 "An Act To Build Greater Accountability into the General Assistance Program by Increasing the Penalty for Falsely Representing Information on an Application for General Assistance."** Sponsored by Representative Picchiotti. **Public hearing: 4/10 at 9:00 am in front of the HHS Committee (Cross Building, Room 209).**
* ***NEW –* LD 219 "An Act To Prioritize Use of Available Resources in General Assistance Programs."** Sponsored by Senator Brakey. **Public hearing: 4/10 at 9:00 am in front of the HHS Committee (Cross Building, Room 209).**
* ***NEW –* LD 220 "An Act To Align Time Limits in the Municipal General Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program."** Sponsored by Senator Brakey. **Public hearing: 4/10 at 9:00 am in front of the HHS Committee (Cross Building, Room 209).**
* ***NEW –* LD 221 "An Act To Amend the Laws Regarding the Municipality of Responsibility for General Assistance Applicants Released from a State Correctional Facility or County Jail Facility."** Sponsored by Senator Gratwick. **Public hearing: 4/10 at 9:00 am in front of the HHS Committee (Cross Building, Room 209).**
* ***NEW –* LD 1109 "An Act To Improve General Assistance Reimbursements."** Sponsored by Senator Chipman. **Public hearing: 4/10 at 9:00 am in front of the HHS Committee (Cross Building, Room 209).**
* ***NEW –* LD 970, An Act To End Homelessness by Expanding Housing Support Services**, sponsored by Rep. Erik Jorgensen (D-Portland), would establish the Housing First Assistance Program at MaineHousing. Under the program, would work with emergency shelters and other crisis responders to provide permanent housing and support services to chronically homeless individuals and families, including those addicted to opiates. The program would follow the core Housing First program elements, including not disqualifying or evicting a resident due to alcohol or substance abuse, a criminal record, poor financial history or lack of an income. The bill includes $675,000 per year for two years to establish and provide 24-hour supportive services for 30 housing units. Public hearing held on 3/27 at 1:00 pm in front of the Labor, Commerce, Research, and Economic Development (LCRED) Committee (Cross Building, Room 208).
* ***NEW –* LD 832, An Act To Carry Out the Will of the People of the State of Maine by Ensuring the Issuance of Bonds To Support the Independence of Maine's Seniors (EMERGENCY)**, sponsored by Sen. Roger Katz (R-Kennebec), a bill similar to his LD 382, calls for the $15M in senior housing bonds approved by the voters in November 2015 to be issued. The bill would remove the requirement that the State Treasurer issue the bonds at the discretion of the Governor. There are conditions under which the bonds would not be issued, e.g., if issuance would adversely impact the State’s credit. **Public hearing: 4/5 at 1:00 pm in front of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs (State House, Room 228).**
* ***NEW –* LD 735, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Support the Independence of Maine's Seniors**, sponsored by Sen. Amy York (R-Cumberland), provides for a $50M bond issue for senior housing. This is MAHC’s bill and is the original amount proposed to the Legislature two years ago. It would provide $40M for new multifamily units, with at least one facility in each Maine county, $5M to rehabilitate existing affordable senior housing facilities, and $5M for home repair and weatherization of existing homes of low-income seniors. The bond proceeds will leverage an estimated $75,000,000 in private and other funds.