Ending the Year on a Bipartisan Note
Increased funding for health and housing programs likely

As 2013 winds to a close, Mobilizer readers can take some solace in a resolution, or at least a temporary détente, in the budget debates in Congress with the announcement of the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA). The BBA will increase funding in FY14 and FY15, a welcome change to the fierce appetite for cutting programs that has prevailed since 2011. Fighting proposed cuts has been the focus of many Mobilizers, but we know that simply protecting currently available affordable housing and services is not going to end homelessness. **Let us celebrate this momentary and partial victory and then redouble our efforts to make the policy changes needed to end homelessness as we know it.**

The passage of the BBA will replace $63 billion of the sequester ($45b in FY14 and $18b in FY15) with alternative savings through small, targeted changes in federal retirement programs, user fees, and other policies (more detail from our friends at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities **here**). These savings will allow the cuts suffered by nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs in FY13 to be restored, **increasing NDD funding to the FY13 pre-sequester level**. This policy change is huge and would not have been possible without the passionate voices of HCH advocates and our allies. **Many thanks for your efforts!**

The restoration of this funding will have a real impact in our communities. The cuts in FY13 led to thousands of Housing Choice Vouchers being taken out of circulation, lengthening waitlists and prolonging homelessness for many. Far too many stories were told of desperate families being promised housing, only to have their vouchers rescinded and their time at the shelter or on the streets prolonged. The increased NDD funding should mean that those rescinded vouchers can be reissued and more needy households can receive assistance in 2014. Health centers can also look forward to receiving the bulk of the funds provided through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), **allowing for billions in new grants for additional sites and services**. The fact that the ACA money is scheduled to run out in FY15 (the health center 'funding cliff') is certainly a concern, but the opportunities for expansion in FY14 and FY15 are very real.

The BBA is not without its flaws. A glaring omission from the deal was the absence of any extension of Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC). This program provides extended benefits for the long-term unemployed, and millions stand to lose benefits, meager as they are, in 2014 without Congressional action. This will likely increase homelessness and harm many who lost their jobs through no fault of their own. The BBA also does not replace the entire sequester, though, leaving millions of cuts in the health center ACA fund and strict caps on NDD funding in place for years to come.

The HCH community has plenty of work ahead of us. While the BBA does increase overall funding, advocacy will be needed to ensure that a sufficient amount of funding is allocated to safety net programs. These decisions will need to be made by January 15, 2014, so stay tuned. Beyond these incremental funding decisions, however, we need to continue to advocate for the resources and support needed to end the crisis of homelessness. We know how to do this, as evidenced by the drop in veteran's homelessness thanks to sufficient supportive housing resources. **Let's resolve to push our public leaders to invest in similar solutions for all those who need them rather than simply fighting to maintain the inadequate system we currently have. With your help, we can make 2014 about reducing homelessness rather than just about not making it worse.**

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