Senate Releases FY2020 Housing Spending Bill with Modest Increases

The Senate Appropriations Committee voted unanimously on September 19 to approve a spending bill for affordable housing and community development programs for fiscal year (FY) 2020. The bill must now head to the Senate floor for approval. More details on the Senate spending bill can be found below and in NLIHC’s updated budget chart.

Thanks to the leadership of Subcommittee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Member Jack Reed (D-RI), the Senate bill provides modest funding increases for affordable housing programs, clearly rejecting President Trump’s call for deep cuts to and even the elimination of affordable housing investments. The Senate bill also clearly rebukes the harmful rent increases, rigid work requirements, and de facto time limits proposed by the president in his past budget requests and in subsequent legislation. The bill fails, however, to include legislative language approved in the House version that would halt cruel proposals from the president to evict mixed-status families from assisted housing and to roll back LGBT protections.

Overall, the bill provides HUD programs with more than $11.9 billion above the president’s FY20 request and $2.3 billion above FY19 enacted levels. This amount is likely enough funding to renew all existing contracts provided through Housing Choice Vouchers ($23.8 billion) and Project-Based Rental Assistance ($12.6 billion) and give level funding or modest increases to other programs, including Public Housing Capital Fund ($2.86 billion), Homeless Assistance Grants ($2.76 billion), Section 202 Housing for the Elderly ($696 million), and Healthy Housing ($290 million). Other programs saw a decrease in funding, including Choice Neighborhoods ($100 million), Housing for Persons with AIDS ($330 million), and Community Development Block Grants ($3.33 billion).

The Senate bill provides $1.5 billion less in funding for HUD programs than the House version, which was written before Congress reached a bipartisan agreement in August to lift the low spending caps on defense and domestic programs. While the budget agreement ensures significant funding, it provides approximately $15 billion less for domestic spending overall than the amounts used by the House.

Advocates should continue to urge their senators and representatives to ensure that HUD programs receive the highest level of funding possible in any final bill.

Given the tight timeline before the start of the fiscal year on October 1, lawmakers are moving quickly to pass a stopgap funding measure, known as a continuing resolution (CR), to avoid a lapse in funding and a government shutdown. Yesterday, September 19, the House passed by a vote of 301-123 a CR to fund the government through November 21. The bill will now need to pass the Senate to avoid a government shutdown.

Key Policy Changes:

The Senate bill does not include a number of provisions approved by the House that would stop harmful proposals by the Trump administration. The House bill would prevent HUD from taking steps to “implement, administer, enforce, or in any way make effective” its proposal to evict mixed-status immigrant families from assisted housing or force them to break up. Language was also included in the House bill to prevent HUD from rolling back LGBT protections, including the agency’s Equal Access rule, and to ensure transgender individuals have access to single-sex emergency shelters and other facilities that match their gender identity.

Tenant-Based Rental Assistance:

The Senate bill provides $23.833 billion for tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA), including $21.5 billion to renew previous contracts. This is a significant increase over President Trump’s $20.116 billion request for TBRA for FY20 and will adequately renew all vouchers.

The bill allocates $40 million for Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH), the same amount as FY19, and $1 million to serve Native American veterans, a decrease of $3 million.

The bill provides $218 million for Section 811 mainstream vouchers, a slight decrease from amounts provided in FY19. The bill also includes level funding for Family Unification vouchers at $20 million.
Project-Based Rental Housing:

The bill provides $12.6 billion to renew project-based rental assistance contracts for calendar year 2020, an increase of $539 million above the president’s request and $813 million more than the FY19 funding level. Advocates estimate this amount will be sufficient to renew all contracts.

Public Housing:

The bill provides the public housing capital account with $2.855 billion, an $80 million increase from the FY19 funding level. This modest increase will enable housing agencies to make critical repairs, such as fixing leaky roofs and replacing outdated heating systems, that will improve living conditions for tens of thousands of residents and help preserve this essential part of the nation’s affordable housing infrastructure for the future. President Trump had proposed zeroing out funding for this account in his FY20 budget.

Funding for the public housing operating fund decreased slightly to $4.650 billion. Funding for the Family Self-Sufficiency program stayed level at $80 million.

The bill also sets out new funding opportunities impacting public housing, including $40 million in competitive grants to public housing agencies (PHA) to reduce lead-based paint hazards ($25 million) and other health hazards, including mold and carbon monoxide poisoning ($15 million).

Homelessness:

The bill increases funding for homeless assistance programs to $2.8 billion from $2.64 billion in FY19. The president would have funded the programs at $2.6 billion. Of these funds, $80 million will target addressing youth homelessness in urban and rural areas.

Other Housing Programs:

The bill provides $696 million to the Section 202 Housing for the Elderly program, a slight increase of $18 million from the FY19 funding bill. The bill maintains funding for the Section 811 Housing for People with Disabilities program at $184 million, $75 million less than the House bill. These amounts provide sufficient funding to renew all contracts, but may not provide new construction for both programs.

The bill would decrease funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program at $3.3 billion, and provide level-funding for the HOME Investments Partnerships program (HOME) at $1.25 billion. Both programs would have been eliminated under the president’s budget request.

Funding for the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) program was decreased by $63 million to $330 million, the same amount included in the president’s budget.

Funding for the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative is reduced to $100 million, although it would have received no funding in the president’s budget.

The bill provides $646 million funding for the Native American Housing Block Grant program, a decrease from FY19 but more than proposed in the president’s budget. The bill also includes an additional $100 million for competitive grants.

The Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grant program received $2 million in the FY20 House bill, the same amount as FY19.

Healthy Homes:

The bill provides $290 million to the Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes’ grants, a modest increase from FY19 and the same level included in the president’s budget.
Fair Housing:

The bill includes $65 million in funding for HUD’s office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, the same amount as in FY19.