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Capitol Connection

CCR&Rs' weekly source for federal child care policy news.

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Congressional Activity

Although Congress had planned to adjourn for the year on September 26, the House and Senate remain in session this week working on the financial industry bail-out bill and other end of the session matters.

Continuing Resolution Passes Congress

Congress passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund most government agencies until March 6 at FY2008 funding levels. Included in the CR is a \$2.5 billion increase above FY2008 for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and for the Pell college grant program as well as an increase of \$1 billion for WIC (the nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children). Funding for child care programs was frozen at FY2008 levels.

The CR also included about \$23 billion for disaster relief for those areas of the country affected by hurricanes and flooding. For disaster relief, FEMA would receive \$7.9 billion in additional funding to help communities recover from recent disasters. Nearly \$7 billion was provided to help communities recover through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, to assist with temporary housing, repairing and replacing damaged homes and public infrastructure, and for economic development. The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG, sometimes referred to as Title XX funding) was increased by \$600 million to help affected states meet social service needs, which could be used for child care, health related services, food assistance, or other social service needs identified by states and communities. Funding for the National Commission on Children and Disasters, charged with conducting a study to determine the needs of children as they relate to preparation for and response to disasters, was also included in the measure.

The text of several appropriation bills were also attached to the CR -- the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, and Defense Appropriations measures. The \$487 billion Department of Defense appropriation bill included \$410 million for family advocacy programs, which includes funding for military child care programs.

Starting Early Starting Right Act

On September 23, Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) introduced the Starting Early Starting Right Act, to amend the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The bill is the House companion measure to legislation introduced by Senator Robert Casey (D-PA), in the Senate in May. NACCRRA supports the legislation, which includes strengthening child care training requirements and inspections.

The bill requires at least two annual inspections, one unannounced and one announced, of child care centers and family child care homes that receive funding under CCDBG. The legislation would also require providers to receive 40-hours of pre-service training and 24-hours of annual training in the areas of health and safety and child development.

Additionally, the legislation requires states to implement ways to address the specific child care needs of low-income and working poor families. Also included is the provision that would require states to develop a plan to provide training to limited English speaking providers. States must also develop outreach strategies and special contracts to increase the availability of child care in underserved communities.

States must also ensure that provider payment rates are equal or exceed the 75th percentile of the current market rate. The quality set-aside would be increased to a minimum of 15 percent of CCDBG funds. Eligible quality activities under the set-aside funds include performing inspections and monitoring, providing grants to unlicensed providers to provide training and support to become licensed, and maintaining a statewide network of child care resource and referral programs.

The measure also includes a 30 percent set-aside to increase the quality of infant and toddler care. States must report, every two years, on areas such as the number of licensed providers and the number of children receiving care. The bill was referred to the House Committees on Education and Labor and Ways and Means. To read the bill, visit: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c110:./temp/~c11045kxAU>

Child Care and Development Block Grant Funding Bill

On September 26, Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) introduced S. 3620, the Child Care Investment Act of 2008. The bill would increase “mandatory” funds for the Child Care and Development Block Grant from \$2.9 billion each year to \$4 billion. The bill also includes an additional \$300 million per year for states to engage in quality-improvement initiatives such as requiring 40 hours of pre-service training and at least two annual inspections, one unannounced and one announced, for providers. The bill was referred to the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over “mandatory” funds provided through CCDBG. Another \$2 billion in “discretionary” funding is provided through CCDBG through annual appropriations. No action is expected on the legislation this year.

Economic Stimulus Package

While Congress has been wrangling over a \$700 billion bailout for the financial industry, there was also deliberation on an economic stimulus package that would have provided \$56 billion in funding for low-income programs and transportation and infrastructure initiatives. The bill failed to pass the Senate on a procedural motion, which required 60 votes to proceed to debate the bill. The vote was 52-42, with 52 Senators supporting the motion to proceed, however, even though this was a majority vote, a super-majority of 60 votes was needed to debate the bill. Therefore, the measure was pulled from the Senate floor. Had the measure passed, it would have increased funding for Food Stamps, Medicaid, education, public housing, and the Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.

Other News

The National Women’s Law Center State Subsidy Report

State Child Care Assistance Policies 2008: Too Little Progress for Children and Families

The National Women’s Law Center released a report on state child care policies. The report compared child care

policies from 2008 to 2007 and 2001 in four areas: income eligibility, waiting lists, copayment requirements, and provider reimbursement rates. The report found that only ten states reimburse providers at the 75th percentile of market rates. Families with income above 150 percent of poverty (\$26,400 a year for a family of three in 2008) could not qualify for assistance in about one-quarter of the states. To read the report in its entirety, please visit: <http://action.nwlc.org/subsidyreport>.

Study Released on the Caregiver-Child Relations & Child Outcomes

The Early Education and Development Journal included a paper by Margaret Owen, Julia Klausli, Ana-Maria Mata-Otero, and Margaret Caughy, "Relationship-focused Child Care Practices: Quality of Care and Child Outcomes for Children in Poverty". The study reviewed the effect of relationships on child care practices with regard to cognitive development in 12 full-day, Head Start centers serving low income, minority three-and four year olds. <http://www.researchconnections.org/location/14586>

Child Trends Releases Child Well-Being Report in Working Poor Families

A report by Richard Wertheimer, Kristin Anderson Moore, and Mary Burkhauser was released by Child Trends, "the Well-Being of Children in Working Poor and Other Families: 1997 and 2004". The report found that between 1997 and 2004, the well-being of children in working poor families improved significantly for 10 of the 15 measures reviewed in the report and remained stable for the remaining measures reviewed. The report suggests that the increase in working poor families' share of all poor families has not led to deteriorating child outcomes but rather that increased work effort among low income families is associated with better child outcomes. To read the report, see: http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2008_09_29_RB_WorkingPoor.pdf.

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