CONGRESSIONAL SPENDING BILL MAINTAINS NATION’S COMMITMENT TO COMBATING HIV & HEPATITIS

Proposed Cuts to Minority AIDS Initiative & Other HIV Related Programs Rejected

Washington, DC – “The AIDS Institute praises the Congress for rejecting cuts to several domestic HIV and related programs that were proposed earlier this year and instead, is proposing to either maintain or increase funding to critical HIV and hepatitis programs,” commented Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “Thanks to all parties coming together in negotiating a budget deal and now, an omnibus appropriations bill, the federal government will maintain its commitment to the nation and the public health by properly funding these programs, instead of eliminating or deeply cutting them.”

Earlier this year, both the House and Senate Appropriation Committees proposed to cut or eliminate several HIV and HIV-related programs. The Senate proposed to eliminate all funding to the HHS Secretary’s Minority AIDS Initiative, the Ryan White Program Special Projects of National Significance, and significantly cut CDC’s STD Prevention program. Additionally, both the House and Senate bills would have all but eliminated the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, and several other health programs. The House bill would have eliminated all funding for Title X Family Planning. In the end, all these cuts were rejected.

In order to provide care, treatment and coverage completion services to over 500,000 low-income, uninsured or underinsured people living with HIV, the final spending bill includes $2.323 billion, an increase of $4 million, to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, including $900 million for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). The proposal in the President’s budget that would have removed all funding from Part D of the Ryan White Program, which serves women, infants, children, and youth with HIV/AIDS, was rejected.

Funding for HIV prevention at the CDC would be increased by $2 million, for a total of $789 million. The increase would be allocated to the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH), which is welcomed news given the growing number of youth, particularly
young gay men, who are becoming infected. In an effort to prevent HIV and hepatitis infections among injection drug users, which has spiked in certain areas, Congress will allow the use of federal funds for ancillary services for syringe exchange programs, but will still ban funding for the actual purchase of syringes.

Funding for Hepatitis Prevention at the CDC would be $34 million, an increase of $2.7 million, far less than the nearly $32 million increase proposed by the President. “Given the magnitude of the number of hepatitis infections and the need for increased surveillance, testing, and education, The AIDS Institute is disappointed the Congress is not at least doubling its investment in hepatitis prevention,” commented Michael Ruppal, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “Educating Congress on the need for increased funding for hepatitis prevention will remain a high priority for us in the coming year.”

Medical research at the National Institutes of Health will increase significantly, by $2 billion, for a total of $32 billion. The exact amount for AIDS research is not yet known, but The AIDS Institute expects, given the need for continued research on an AIDS vaccine, new prevention and treatment technologies, and cure research, the level will be consistent with previous allocations.

Funding for the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) would increase by $5 million to $335 million. The AIDS Institute is disappointed that Congress did not agree with the President and Senate’s proposal to modernize how HOPWA funds are distributed. This would have allocated grants based on a combination of HIV cases along with rental costs and poverty levels rather than an outdated basis that only uses cumulative AIDS cases.

The AIDS Institute is also disappointed that discretionary funding for failed abstinence-only-until-marriage programs would double from $5 to $10 million.

“In the end, Congress did the right thing and now, federal agencies and their grantees can proceed with implementing the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, which includes goals to reduce new infections, increase access to care and treatment, reduce health disparities, and improve federal coordination. In order to reach the goals outlined in the AIDS Strategy, along with those in the “Action Plan for the Prevention, Care & Treatment of Viral Hepatitis”, will require a sustained level of resources. We thank the President and the Congress for their bipartisan commitment, and look forward to working with them on eventually ending AIDS and hepatitis," concluded Ruppal.

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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education.

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