

Federal Spending Limits Could Impose Serious Hardships

Myrna Mandlawitz, Esq.
LDA Policy Director

The federal government is operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR), a stopgap provision allowing the government to function even though spending levels for the current fiscal year (FY 2011) have not been finalized. The CR is set to expire on March 4, and Congress must act again to keep the government functioning.

Reducing Funding to Fiscal Year 2008

House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) was given unprecedented unilateral authority to establish the total dollar amount to be divided among the 12 appropriations subcommittees. His goal is to roll back spending to the FY 2008 levels. Mr. Ryan's allocation sets non-security discretionary spending at \$420 billion, a reduction of \$43 billion or 9.3% below Fiscal Year 2010 (the current CR amount).

In the next step in the process, House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) has divided the \$420 billion among the subcommittees. If the full Appropriations Committee approves the Chairman's allocations this week, the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Subcommittee would receive an amount \$12.33 billion or 7.3% below the CR level. For education alone, this would mean a cut of \$5.1 billion.

Action on the next CR is expected on the House floor the week of February 14, and House leaders have indicated they want the bill completed by February 16. The ultimate goal would be to get a bill funding each of the 12 subcommittees, but that seems less and less likely. The CR bill will be open to amendments. New House rules would allow in order only amendments that further cut spending or that propose funding increases for a program achieved by cutting funding for other programs under that same subcommittee's jurisdiction. The earliest the Senate will act on the bill is the week of February 28.

The President's Proposed Budget

In the meantime, looming on the horizon is the release of the president's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2012! Federal Fiscal Year 2011 actually began on October 1, 2010. So while Congress continues to sort through FY2011 spending, they are coming up against deadlines to set spending for the next fiscal year.

In the State of the Union address, the president announced he would propose a five-year funding freeze. Again, this does not bode well.

Too Complicated?

If you are scratching your head and trying to sort this out, you are not alone. Seasoned advocates are flummoxed by all that is going on right now! The bottom line: programs LDA members support that affect all aspects of life for individuals with learning disabilities may see cuts in the

coming year. And while the House particularly believes it has a mandate to rein in spending, several recent polls (Gallup, CNN, and CBS/New York Times) show Americans, by more than a 2-1 margin, oppose cutting federal funding for education, even if it means increasing the federal deficit.

LDA is working for you. We are watching and working every day with our partners in Washington to minimize the harm these cuts would have on individuals with learning disabilities. We'll keep you posted, so stay tuned!