

# Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

September 8, 2020

## COVID-19 RELIEF LEGISLATION

Senate Republicans will seek to vote this week on a “skinny” pandemic relief bill that would provide about \$500 billion in new assistance. The revised package is much smaller than the \$1 trillion package that Senate Republicans unveiled in July and would include additional unemployment assistance and liability protections for businesses. Notably, this measure does not include any additional funding for state and local government fiscal relief. There is no indication yet that the bill will receive the support from Democratic Senators that will be needed to proceed under Senate rules.

We are continuing to advocate for a comprehensive relief package in close coordination with NACo, CSAC and other local representatives. We are requesting support for a final package along the lines of H.R. 6800, the *Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act*, which passed the House in May. Just before Congress recessed for the August break, we assisted Board Chair Hart in contacting our Senators to thank them for their efforts and to reiterate the need for fiscal relief to be provided to local governments of all sizes, with flexibility to use the funding where and when needed. We also asked for support for supplemental funding for programs that allocate funding to the County and for additional financial assistance to businesses and individuals.

## COVID-19 RELIEF FOR BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS

In July, we provided information requested by CEO Miyasato to analyze the outlook for pandemic relief programs to aid businesses and individuals who have suffered harm from the economic recession. The CARES Act included expanded unemployment benefits, direct payments to individuals, and SBA forgivable loans through the Paycheck Protection Program.

The House-passed *HEROES Act* includes provisions to continue each of these efforts, while Senate Republicans have proposed more limited funding. The expanded federal unemployment benefit of \$600 per week expired in July and the gap between the parties on this issue has been one of the more difficult issues in negotiations. The scaled-back pandemic bill that Senate Republicans unveiled today would provide an additional \$300 in weekly unemployment benefits through December and authorize another round of Paycheck Protection Program loans.

## HUD FUNDING

On August 10, the Department of Housing and Urban Development announced an award of \$1,043,278 to the County to help low-income families during the pandemic with assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher program. The award to the County was part of a distribution of \$472 million from the CARES Act. Earlier in the year, HUD made initial allocations of CARES Act funds that brought \$823,241 to the County for pandemic relief.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

House Democrats jump-started federal infrastructure efforts with passage of H.R. 2, the *Moving Forward Act*, in July. This legislation would provide \$1.5 trillion in funding for infrastructure through a wide variety of new and existing federal programs. H.R. 2 includes a \$494 billion reauthorization of surface transportation programs and hundreds of billions of dollars in funding for other infrastructure, such as airports, broadband, public housing, clean energy grants, health care infrastructure, and drinking water programs.

The Senate approach to infrastructure legislation has been much more limited. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee passed S. 2302, the *America’s Transportation*

*Infrastructure Act of 2019 (ATIA)*, which proposes to increase spending on federal highway programs by about 27 percent. The portions of the legislation related to public transportation must still be added by the Banking Committee. The rail and highway safety sections also need to be added by the Commerce Committee, while the financing provisions for the bill are under the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee.

The upcoming expiration of current surface transportation authorizations on October 1 will require Congress to extend these programs if rapid progress on this issue is not made during the month of September.

#### **ARMY CORPS PROGRAMS**

On July 30, the House passed H.R. 7575, the *Water Resources Development Act of 2020*, to reauthorize Army Corps of Engineers projects and policies. We carefully reviewed the bill for any provisions that would impact the County, ensuring that ongoing efforts by Congress to de-authorize older projects would not impact projects such as Lower Mission Creek. At Representative Carbajal's request, the legislation includes report language that encourages the Corps to initiate a reevaluation study of the LMC project in order to account for population growth, property values, and any new disaster threats associated with the project area. This could be helpful in achieving a better benefit-cost evaluation of the project, which would greatly improve the chances for construction funding. The Senate's WRDA 2020 proposal, the *America's Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA) of 2020*, has been approved by the Environment and Public Works Committee but has not yet received a floor vote.

#### **ELDER JUSTICE ACT**

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Grassley (R-IA) introduced S. 4182 the *Emergency Support for Nursing Homes and Elder Justice Reform Act of 2020*, in July, which includes provisions to reauthorize Elder Justice Act programs through 2023. The bill would also im-

prove existing programs to protect older Americans and provide help to nursing homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. S. 4182 is a candidate for inclusion in the pending pandemic relief package that is under discussion in Congress.

#### **CENSUS**

Earlier in the year, the Trump Administration had requested more time to complete the decennial census and House Democrats included in H.R. 6800, the *HEROES Act*, language to allow a 120-day delay. Subsequently, the Administration has insisted that the Census Bureau will be able to deliver an accurate decennial count by the end of the year and has moved to wrap things up without an extension. Our local delegation has called on the Census Bureau to ensure an accurate census during the coronavirus pandemic by not stopping its counting efforts early. In addition, a U.S. District Court has ordered the count to continue pending a September 17 hearing to review the Administration's approach.

#### **MARIJUANA POLICY**

House Majority Leader Hoyer recently informed members that the House would be scheduling a vote on Judiciary Committee Chairman Nadler's (D-NY) H.R. 3884, the *Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act*, during the week of September 21. H.R. 3884 would remove marijuana from the federal list of controlled substances and expunge some marijuana-related criminal records. Senator Harris introduced the Senate version of the legislation as S. 2227, but no action has been scheduled on that bill.

The House-passed H.R. 6800, the *HEROES Act*, includes provisions to expand access to banking for legitimate cannabis-related businesses. The provisions are similar to H.R. 1595, the *SAFE Banking Act*, which passed the House last year.

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