

Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

October 9, 2008

FY 2009 FEDERAL FUNDING

As the October 1 beginning of the new Federal Fiscal Year approached, it became apparent that Congress would not complete work on most of the FY 2009 appropriations bills. As predicated, the House and Senate approved a Continuing Resolution funding most Federal agencies at FY 2008 levels through March 3, 2009. However, the measure, known as H.R. 2638, the *FY 2009 Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act*, does include the completed FY 2009 Homeland Security, Defense, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations measures, as well as a disaster relief package. Further action on the FY 2009 spending bills, including the County's programmatic and project-related priorities will be determined by the outcome of the Presidential election, and will either take place during a November lame duck session or in the 111th Congress after the first of the year.

WILDFIRE MITIGATION

Over the last several months we have kept in close contact with Senator Feinstein's office regarding her proposal to provide additional funding for wildfire related activities. During a recent meeting in the Senator's office, we were informed that the disaster relief package in the Continuing Resolution included her proposal for \$910 million to address wildfires in the west. Of that amount, \$775 million is designated for the United State Forest Service for wildfire suppression, hazardous fuels reduction and hazard mitigation activities, and rehabilitation and restoration of Federal lands.

We continued to monitor action on Senator Boxer's S. 3256, the *Federal Land Assistance Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act*. Senator Boxer introduced the measure as a companion bill to H.R. 5541, which was approved by the House in July. The measure would create a new funding account specifi-

cally for catastrophic emergency wildland fire suppression activities on Federal lands, as well as requiring the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a cohesive wildland fire strategy. We urged Senator Boxer to work with Senate leadership to bring either her bill or the House-passed version to the Senate floor during the lame duck session in November.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FUNDING

The FY 2009 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act included in the Continuing Resolution provides funding for a variety of programs that we advocated on behalf of the County, including \$950 million for State Homeland Security and Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Grants, the same level as in FY 2008. The measure provides \$750 million for firefighter grants, including the SAFER program, and increases Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) by \$15 million to \$315 million.

HOMELESSNESS

As the House and Senate raced to complete business last week in anticipation of recessing for the upcoming elections, we continued to advocate for action on legislation to reauthorize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, citing the nearly 6,300 homeless adults and children in the County, and the valuable resources to address homelessness that the Act provides. Both the House and Senate had previously approved McKinney reauthorization legislation at the committee level, and on October 2, the House approved a compromise version as H.R. 7221 the *Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2008*. It is anticipated that the Senate will consider H.R. 7221 during the lame duck session in November. Amongst other changes, the bill would consolidate McKinney programs, codify the continuum of care planning process, and expand the definition of homelessness

regarding youth and families. In a related action, the House and Senate both approved Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Leahy's (D-VT), S. 2982, the *Runaway and Homeless Youth Protection Act*, clearing it for the White House.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Following approval of H.R. 1532 the *Comprehensive Tuberculosis Elimination Act* by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, we urged the local Congressional delegation to support the measure when it came to a floor vote by the full House, citing provisions to provide additional resources for local governments to address control and elimination of TB. The House approved the measure on September 24, and the Senate followed suit on September 27, clearing the bill to be sent to the White House.

We contacted members of the House and Senate Labor/HHS Appropriations Subcommittees to advocate in support of the highest possible funding for the Ryan White Part C program in the *FY 2009 Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act*, citing the importance of the funding for services to the nearly 450 HIV/AIDS patients in the County. We also urged our local Congressional delegation and Senators Boxer and Feinstein to support Part C funding. However, the CR did not address funding for individual programs.

We continued to advocate in support of Congresswoman Capps' H.R. 1014, the *Heart Disease Education, Analysis, Research, and Treatment (HEART) for Women Act*. The bill was approved by the House on September 25 and referred to the Senate for action, possibly during the lame duck session.

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTIONS

We closely monitored Congressional action on competing House and Senate legislation to improve outcomes for children in foster care and improve incentives for adoption. In mid-September we participated in a briefing by staff from the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees regarding a just-

drafted compromise bill. Introduced as H.R. 6893, the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act*, the legislation includes provisions to increase funding for adoptions, provide incentives for the placement of foster children with competent relatives, and permit older foster children to be eligible for benefits until age 21. The House and Senate both approved the compromise proposal, and President Bush signed it into law on October 7.

METHAMPHETAMINES

We continued to advocate in support of additional Federal resources for local interdiction, prevention, and treatment strategies targeting the methamphetamine problem, as well as for stricter penalties and controls on meth precursors. On September 25, the Senate approved S. 1276, the *Methamphetamine Production Prevention Act*, to authorize grants to state and local governments to plan, develop, implement, or enhance methamphetamine precursor electronic logbook systems. The House approved the bill on September 29. The Senate also approved the House version of Senator Feinstein's *Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Act* as H.R. 1199, and it was signed into law by President Bush on October 7.

MENTALLY ILL OFFENDERS

We continued to lobby Senate Majority Leader Reid (D-NV) to schedule full Senate consideration of S. 2304, the *Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Reauthorization and Improvement Act*, to provide grants for improved mental health treatment services for mentally ill offenders, as well as a new grant program to train law enforcement personnel to respond to incidents involving the mentally ill. The House approved its version of the bill in January as H.R. 3992. The Senate approved S. 2304 by unanimous consent on September 26 and the House then concurred with the Senate proposal, clearing it for the President.

ELDER ABUSE

We continued to advocate with the House Judiciary Committee in support of legislation

to address elder abuse. On September 23, the House approved H.R. 5352, the *Elder Abuse Victims Act*, which includes provisions for grants to support local and state prosecutors and general law enforcement in elder justice matters. The measure has been referred to the Senate, which may consider it in the November lame duck session.

PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES

We joined NACo and other stakeholders in lobbying for action on provisions in H.R. 3058, the *Public Land Communities Transition Assistance Act*, to guarantee funding for the Payment In Lieu of Taxes program at \$350 million, which would increase the

County's PILT allocation by approximately 65% to about \$1.67 million. The bill also reauthorizes the Secure Rural Schools program, under which the County is eligible for about \$40,000 annually as its share of local Federal national forest revenues. When the Senate redrafted the financial rescue bill last week as H.R. 1424, the *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act*, it included provisions fully funding PILT and reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools program. President Bush signed it into law on October 3.

v Tom Walters v