
House Set to Vote on New Funding for Affordable Housing – Calls Needed!

On May 17, the House began debate on H.R. 1427, The Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2007. Roll call votes on the bill and related amendments are scheduled for Tuesday afternoon (Eastern time), May 22. Please contact your Representative Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning.

The general purpose of the bill is to reform the government-sponsored entities (GSEs) and to strengthen the role of the GSE regulator. The bill also includes a section that creates an Affordable Housing Fund paid for by 1.2 basis points on each of the GSEs, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, total outstanding mortgages. The fund will make grants to for-profit and nonprofit developers to build, preserve, and rehabilitate affordable housing for very low-income and extremely low-income households. A significant portion of the affordable housing will be rental housing. The first year grants will be limited to the Gulf Coast area. The bill also provides that the Affordable Housing Fund will be a dedicated source of funding for a National Housing Trust Fund when one is created. A National Housing Trust Fund bill is expected to be introduced in the House this summer.

Congressman Hensarling (R-TX) has offered an amendment (Mr. Hensarling amendment no. 28) that would have the effect of excluding many LSA members and other faith-based organizations from using the affordable housing trust funds to help low-income families. The Hensarling amendment would limit eligible recipients of

affordable housing funds to organizations that have as their primary purpose the provision of affordable housing. Further, if the amendment were accepted, it would prohibit recipients of the affordable housing funds from engaging in voter registration and lobbying activities with their own private funds during the period they are utilizing affordable housing funds. Nonprofit organizations would be forced to choose between participating in Affordable Housing Fund programs or engaging in constitutionally protected voter registration and lobbying activities with their own funds.

A similar amendment was offered to a version of this bill in the last Congress. LSA opposed the amendment and urged the House to reject proposals to restrict eligibility for the Affordable Housing Fund, which would have excluded many Lutheran organizations.

Action Needed: Call Your Representative today or Tuesday morning and urge him/her to:

- Vote YES on H.R. 1427, The Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2007, which would create an Affordable Housing Fund.
- Vote NO on any amendment to strike the Affordable Housing Fund.
- Vote NO on the Hensarling amendment no. 28 to exclude nonprofit organizations that provide services in addition to affordable housing or that engage in nonpartisan political activity.
- Vote NO on any amendment that deletes language, which reserves the funds in the Affordable Housing Fund for the National Housing Trust Fund.
- Vote NO on a "motion to recommit" that would send the bill back to the Committee.

Please use this toll free number, 1-877-210-5351, to be connected to the congressional switchboard. Ask to be connected to the legislative assistant on housing for your Representative.

If you have questions about this legislation and to report the outcome of your call, please contact Kathy Saile, Associate Director of Public Policy, at ksaile@lutheranservices.org or 202-626-7932.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform to be Considered in the Senate This Week

The Senate is scheduled to consider comprehensive immigration reform legislation (S. 1348) this week after the Senate leadership and the Bush administration reached agreement on key provisions. The bill would significantly reduce family reunification, would not allow temporary workers to become citizens, and would allow 12 million undocumented persons to make the transition to work visas and ultimately become citizens.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (www.lirs.org) voiced grave concern over the compromise bill, stating that the bill would make it far more difficult for family members to reunite in the United States in the future. More than half of the green cards that are awarded would still be awarded based on family relations, but the proposal would limit most of the green cards to spouses and non-adult children. The plan would retroactively set a May 2005 cut-off date for many categories of family visa applications. Those who applied after the cut-off date would have to requalify under a new points-based system.

Congress Adopts Budget Resolution

On May 17, congressional leaders reached an agreement on the fiscal year 2008 budget resolution. The Senate passed the resolution on a 52-40 vote and the House passed the resolution on a 214-209. Both chambers passed the resolution largely on party lines.

The budget resolution is a framework for federal spending. The resolution is not legally binding and the President does not need to sign it.

The budget resolution includes changes to the Senate rules. The resolution adopts full “pay-go” rules for the Senate, which are similar to the House “pay-go” rules that were adopted in early January. The new Senate “pay-go” rules would require offsets for new tax cuts and for increases in mandatory (entitlement) spending unless 60 Senators vote to waive the requirement.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the budget resolution sets the non-defense domestic discretionary spending cap at \$452.3 billion. This is \$1.7 billion below what was assumed in the House-passed budget resolution and \$5.2 billion above what was assumed in the Senate-passed plan. The spending cap for fiscal year 2008 is a modest increase over fiscal year 2007 spending. Non-defense discretionary programs represent approximately 15 percent of the \$2.9 trillion federal budget.

The budget resolution also assumes \$50 billion over five years to expand health coverage to children who are uninsured but eligible for the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). If children who are eligible for the Medicaid program are found as a result of SCHIP outreach efforts, they may be enrolled in Medicaid. Congress is expected to reauthorize the SCHIP program this year.

The appropriations committees can now begin working on the spending bills for fiscal year 2008. The House Appropriations Chairman, David Obey (D-WI), has set a goal to have all 12 appropriations bills passed before the House adjourns for the July 4th recess. One of the first appropriations bills that will be heard in the House is the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bill. The Senate Appropriations Chairman, Robert Byrd (D-WV), has said he hopes that the Senate will be finished with the appropriations bills by the end of July. However, Congress frequently finishes the appropriations process in the fall after returning from August recess. President Bush has threatened to veto appropriation bills that exceed his proposed spending caps.

Federal Funding Available for Nonprofit Organizations

Child Welfare and Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment. On May 4, 2007, the Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced the availability of competitive grant funds authorized by the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program. These targeted grants will be awarded to regional partnerships that provide services, through interagency collaboration and integration of programs and services. The grants fund activities and services that are designed to increase the well-being of, improve permanency outcomes for, and enhance the safety of children who are in an out-of-home placement or are at risk of being placed in an out-of-home placement as a result of a parent's or caretaker's methamphetamine or other substance abuse. Private agencies may apply for these funds. Under this announcement there are four Program Options: two possible federal award amounts, \$500,000 or \$1 million per budget period and two possible grant periods, three years or five years. The estimated total program funding is \$145 million. To access the full grant announcement online, go to: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/HHS-2007-ACF-ACYF-CU-0022.html>.

Interested applicants may also want to consult, "The Promise of New Funding for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment to Promote Safety, Permanence, and Well-Being for Children: Questions and Answers About New Grants Under the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 P.L. 109-288." These Questions and Answers (Q&A) were prepared by an informal coalition of groups, including the American Public Human Services Association, Center for Law and Social Policy, Child Welfare League of America, Children's Defense Fund, Legal Action Center, National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, and the Rebecca Project

for Human Rights. The Q&A is available online at: www.childrensdefense.org/pssf_qa.

Supportive Services for the Elderly. HUD is encouraging nonprofit organizations to apply for funding for the Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency program (ROSS) program. Nonprofit organizations working with public housing resident associations may apply for federal funding to create programs that will help deliver and coordinate services to elderly public housing residents. Eligible activities include, but are not limited to, supportive services, case management, education programs, and transportation services.

HUD's "Funding Announcements" page on www.hud.gov provides detail information on the program. Grant applications are available through www.grants.gov.

New Advocacy Resource Available

LSA's new public policy advocacy toolkit is now available. The toolkit includes examples of LSA member advocacy efforts, step by step instructions to create a structure for a public policy advocacy program, and an extensive Tools and Resources section. There are chapters devoted to building relationships with government decision-makers, including legislators; grassroots advocates; community partners; the media; and within the social ministry organization.

Readers have commented that the toolkit "is an amazing document. As I read on, I became more and more engaged. The information was relevant, easy to understand..." One CEO wrote "I had an opportunity to read the [LSA Public Policy Advocacy Toolkit] yesterday on an airplane ride...it is an outstanding piece of work. I am impressed with its breadth, scope, thoroughness, readability, and accuracy."

Order forms are available on the Public Policy Advocacy page of the LSA website (www.lutheranservices.org) or you may call LSA at (410)230-2701 to order the toolkit. The toolkit is \$40.00, which includes shipping and handling.