



State Budget Update: Legislature Approves MI Choice Funding Increase Budgets Sent to Governor for Approval or Veto

The Michigan House and Senate have passed state department budgets for Fiscal Year 2020, which begins on October 1, 2019. The budgets will now be considered by Governor Whitmer, who must sign the budgets for them to take effect. In Michigan, the Governor has line-item veto authority, meaning that she can eliminate funding for individual programs before signing the budget. The budgets were passed without much Democratic support in the legislature—advocates are watching closely to see how the Governor will respond to the legislature's proposals.

MI Choice Medicaid Waiver Program

In a major victory for aging advocates, the legislature's budget includes a \$40.5 million total increase (\$14.6 million from the state General Fund) for the MI Choice Medicaid Waiver Program. This funding will be directed to increase the reimbursement rates for service providers by 5% and to increase the number of total MI Choice enrollments by 1,000. The MI Choice Medicaid Waiver Program provides long term supportive services in the community to adults who require a nursing facility level of care. Advocates are encouraged to contact the Governor's office and urge her to support the legislature's proposal for MI Choice. The Governor's office can be reached at 517-373-3400.

Specialized Services Transportation

The legislature passed a \$500,000 increase (13%) for specialized services transportation. While this is less than the \$1 million increase recommended by the Governor and Senate, this increase is significant, as specialized service transportation has been flat funded for many years. Specialized Services funds are allocated to public transit authorities, which subcontract with mostly local nonprofits municipalities, senior centers and councils on aging to provide gap filling small bus programs, offering door to door service for Southeast Michigan seniors and people with disabilities.

Senior Center Funding

The budget includes a one time investment of \$500,000 for grants to multipurpose senior centers. This funding will support \$5,000 grants for senior health programs.

Alzheimer's Disease Program

The legislature included \$400,000 for an Alzheimer's disease service program provided by the Alzheimer's Association in the FY 2020 budget. Services will include a 24/7 helpline, care consultation, and referrals to community based services in 10 Michigan Counties, including Macomb, Monroe, Oakland and St. Clair Counties in Region 1-B.

Silver Key Coalition— Senior In-Home Services

The legislature's budget included a small reduction of \$101,000 (less than 1%) to AASA in-home community services. Advocates should encourage the legislature to restore these funds in supplemental appropriations bills.

House HELP Committee Passes Older Americans Act Reauthorization

The federal Older Americans Act (OAA) funds critical services for older adults and their caregivers provided by Area Agencies on Aging, such as home delivered meals and in-home care. The current Older Americans Act authorization expires this year. Congress has been working to reauthorize the law to keep programs up to date and ensure that the aging network can continue to support the needs of our rapidly growing older adult population and their caregivers. On September 18th, the House Education and Labor (HELP) Committee approved the passage of H.R. 4334, the Dignity in Aging Act, which reauthorizes the Older Americans Act (OAA) for five years, through 2024. The bill passed unanimously.

Key provisions of the bill include:

- Extending the OAA for five years, two years longer than the prior reauthorization.
- Providing notable increases in authorized funding levels: a seven percent increase the first year, with six percent increases each year after.
- Language to make clear that Area Agencies on Aging can engage in private pay, integrated care and other arrangements to expand services.
- Removing the funding cap dictating how much funding can be directed towards grandfamilies and older relative caregivers, allowing more local flexibility.
- Creating new research and demonstration authority at the Administration on Aging.
- Recognizing the negative effects of social isolation and loneliness and reinforces the Aging Network's role in preventing isolation and promoting engagement among older adults.

The bill will now be considered by the full House of Representatives. The Senate Health Education and Labor Committee began work on drafting a OAA reauthorization in June, but has not yet taken a vote on the bill.

Federal Senate Proposes Flat Funding for Senior Programs Continuing Resolution Expected

The Senate Appropriations committee released its Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 budget for senior programs, recommending level funding for core Older Americans Act programs. The House passed budget included significant funding increases for the Older Americans Act. It is not likely that the House and Senate will be able to pass a final spending bill by October 1, so it is expected that they will pass a continuing resolution (CR) to extend current funding levels into November to allow for more time to finalize spending proposals. The House passed a CR that would keep the federal government funded until November 21st, but at the time of this writing the Senate had not yet taken action to pass a CR.



The Area Agency on Aging 1-B (AAA 1-B) is a nonprofit agency serving the needs of older adults in Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Washtenaw counties. Contact Katie Wendel, (248) 262-9232 or by e-mail at kwendel@aaa1b.org to join the Senior Advocacy Network or receive copies of AAA 1-B reports referenced in The Advocate.