

Congress Approves FY05 Funding Levels, Cuts Key Programs

On November 20, Congress approved FY 2005 budgets for agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control And Prevention (CDC), and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). In almost all instances, Congress reduced funding for programs important to lead poisoning prevention, affordable housing, and environmental health. The amounts included in the Consolidated Appropriations Bill were then reduced by an additional 0.8% across-the-board cut to meet budget caps.

HUD's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control (OHHLHC) suffered A \$7.3 million cut, with the office funded at \$166.7 million. \$91.9 Million will go to lead hazard control grants, \$7.9 million to Operation LEAP, \$9.4 million for technical assistance, and \$9.8 million to the Healthy Homes Initiative grant program. Congress also agreed to continue the urban lead hazard reduction grant program that targets areas with the worst lead hazards, setting funding at \$46.6 million, \$3.1 million less than FY 2004.

EPA's environmental health budget experienced a mix of increases and cuts over FY04. Both the environmental justice and asthma programs were provided with more funding, while the lead hazard reduction program was cut by more than \$3 million. The radon program was funded at approximately the same level as FY04.

A variety of housing programs operated by HUD were also significantly impacted by the budget bill. Congress undermined the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program with extremely restrictive language in its report that limits funding to vouchers that were actually being used in the period of May to July 2004. This means that local housing authorities that currently have more vouchers in use than they did five months ago will start at a funding loss, making fewer vouchers available to families in need throughout FY05. Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and the HOME Investment Partnership Program, both of which are often used to fund rehabilitation of older, substandard housing, were also cut deeply, with CDBG funding reduced by more than \$225 million and HOME funding reduced by nearly \$100 million. Almost every other housing program important to families across the nation also saw funding reductions.

The full text of the bill, as well as the conference committee report language, is currently available at the Library of Congress THOMAS website, <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/approp/app05.html>. Readers are advised that many of the report documents are very large and may take a substantial time to access.

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