2021 POLICY BRIEF

Support the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your Members of Congress, particularly those who serve on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee, to support full funding for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Social Services Block Grant (SSBG).

BACKGROUND:

SSBG was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1981 (P.L. 97-35) and is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The program is a capped entitlement to states with no matching requirement, and Congress must therefore appropriate SSBG funds each year. At its highest, the cap was set at $2.8 billion, but since 2001, Congress has authorized SSBG at $1.7 billion yearly. However, since FY 2014, SSBG has been subject to sequestration—a spending reduction process by which budgetary resources are canceled to enforce budget policy goals—receiving cut of roughly 7 percent each fiscal year.

Nine states pass SSBG funds directly to counties: Colorado, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin, though counties in other states can access SSBG funds as well. According to a NACo analysis of Federal Audit Clearinghouse data, counties used over $763 million in SSBG funds between Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 and FY 2016.

SSBG funds support nearly 30 different types of services. As the coronavirus pandemic persists, the local health and human services safety-net is facing unprecedented pressure for emergency services. With counties on the front lines responding to the far-reaching health, safety and economic consequences of the COVID-19 emergency, our federal partners can offer crucial support by providing full, flexible funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG).

In FY 2016, the last year for which data is available, 26 million individuals received services supported in whole or in part by SSBG, 41 percent of whom were children. The highest SSBG spending goes toward for child welfare and child protective services, general support services, and adult protective services which prevent and remedy abuse, neglect and exploitation of the elderly and disabled adults.

In FY 2016, the last year for which data is available, 26 million individuals received services supported in whole or in part by SSBG, 41 percent of whom were children

In FY 2016, 10 percent ($285 million) of total SSBG expenditures went toward adult protective and elder justice programs and services

Nine states pass SSBG funds directly to counties: Colorado, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin

SSBG funding for adult protective services is especially useful for counties. Roughly 11 percent of individuals over the age of 60 are thought to suffer from some form of abuse, including financial. Counties are typically responsible for adult protective services but lack adequate federal support for these activities—the Elder Justice Act has received less than 10 percent of authorized funding levels since its 2010 enactment under the Affordable Care Act, for instance. SSBG funding is crucial for filling that gap to support elder justice programs and activities, and in FY 2016, 10 percent ($285 million) of total SSBG expenditures went toward these services. Meanwhile, as the rate of children in foster care because of parental substance abuse continues to grow, SSBG funds are especially valuable for supplementing other federal child welfare dollars. In 12 states, counties are partially or fully responsible for operating the child welfare system to provide child protective services and foster care to neglected and abused children. In FY 2016, the highest share— 33 percent—of SSBG expenditures went toward child welfare services, totaling nearly $400 million.

Although SSBG helps our nation's most vulnerable populations, years of sequestration cuts have eroded the resources flowing to states and counties. NACo will continue to advocate for restoring SSBG funding to its previous levels.

COVID-19: The flexible nature of SSBG, as well as its lack of a state match requirement, makes it a useful resource for states and counties seeking to help vulnerable populations during emergencies and natural disasters. In 2013, Congress provided supplemental SSBG funds to respond to Hurricane Sandy, supporting services such as meal delivery, emergency transportation, services for the disabled, adult protective services, home based care, health services, employment services, child care and more. To date, Congress has not passed supplemental SSBG funding for COVID-19 pandemic response.

KEY TALKING POINTS

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) provides funds to states for activities that serve vulnerable populations, including adults and children at risk of abuse and neglect. Nine states – Colorado, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin – pass these funds directly to counties

Counties across the country reported utilizing over $763 million in SSBG funds between FY 2014 and FY 2016

SSBG is the main source of federal funds for adult protective services, which are often a county responsibility. SSBG funding is critical to these efforts due to historic lack of funding for other federal elder abuse prevention programs

In 11 states, counties are fully or partially responsible for fulfilling the federal mandate to provide child protective services and foster care to neglected and abused children. SSBG funds can support foster care placements for children who are otherwise ineligible for the federal foster care program

SSBG has received automatic cuts annually since FY 2014, corresponding with a 15 percent decline in individuals benefitting from the program in FY 2016

Because SSBG does not require a state match, it is an especially valuable resource for state and county governments

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