



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

The National
Advocacy Center

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member, Senate
Appropriations Committee
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

CC: All members of the Senate Appropriations Committee

June 20, 2006

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Byrd,

As the Senate Appropriations Committee begins marking up appropriations bills, I am writing on behalf of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to express our deep concern about the overall funding cap, which will provide inadequate funding for critical human services. We strongly urge the committee to support efforts to restore funding at least to FY2005 levels to ensure that the needs of communities and our country's most vulnerable citizens are being met.

During the Senate floor debate on the budget resolution, important amendments were approved to increase discretionary funding, particularly for Labor, Health, Human Services, and Education programs, over the draconian levels proposed by the President. Unfortunately, these increases were removed as part of the conference agreement for the emergency supplemental spending bill and an overall discretionary cap of \$873 billion was imposed. The negative impact of this cap is already being seen in the appropriations bills moving through the House, particularly in the Labor-HHS bill. For example, according to the Administration's budget figures, flat-funding CCDBG would mean 400,000 fewer children would receive child care help by 2011 and this is in addition to the 250,000 children who have already lost child care since FY 2000. In addition, a freeze on Head Start funding would mean that 25,000 fewer children would be served. Moreover, despite the growing need for job training services to help workers adapt to the rapidly changing job market and although we continue to hear from Good Shepherd programs across the country about increased needs for health, mental health, and other social services, the strict budgetary cap has led to further cuts in training and employment services programs, the Community Services Block Grant, and flat-funding of the Social Services Block Grant, despite past promises to restore SSBG funding to fully authorized levels. A recent survey conducted by the Coalition on Human Needs studied 72 programs or groups of programs within the House Labor-HHS appropriations bill and found that 67 are cut below FY 2005 levels, taking inflation into account.

Good Shepherd programs across the country constantly remind us that these cuts are not just numbers, but have a real human impact: A mother in a domestic violence shelter is unable to receive the child care assistance and job training she needs to support herself and her children in an environment free from violence; inner city youth no longer have access to education, mental health, and job training services that offer them a second chance after poor high school experiences; low-income students are less able to afford a college education because fewer federal grants are available. These cuts deny opportunity, undermine the common good, and highlight the misplaced priorities that have governed the budget process for the past several years.

As a faith-based organization, the National Advocacy Center has for several years been urging members of Congress to evaluate all budget decisions through a moral lens, giving special attention to how these decisions impact the most vulnerable in our nation. This position, rooted in gospel values, Catholic social teaching, Good Shepherd spirituality and the experience of Good Shepherd programs throughout the country has led us to speak out against federal budget proposals that have left too many without access to vital health, education, job training, and community services. While the National Advocacy Center recognizes the constraints of the current fiscal situation, history has shown that the federal budget can be balanced without significant cuts to critical human services if a balanced approach is taken. We urge you not to place the burden of deficit reduction on important health, human services, labor, and education programs that provide support and hope to our nation's low-income and disadvantaged communities. We hope that you and other members of the Appropriations Committee will make better choices, follow through with the funding increases supported by bipartisan majorities during the floor debate on the budget resolution, and work to ensure that sufficient resources are provided for all critical social services.

Sincerely,

Alison L. Prevost, *Lobbyist*

