



ADVANCING EXCELLENCE IN
FEDERAL CHILD WELFARE POLICY
through Innovation & Collaboration

Protect Vital Human Services in the Budget and Appropriations Debate—Including the Social Services Block Grant

HOT TOPIC

ACTION

- Protect federal funding that supports vulnerable children and families. Protect the Social Services Block Grant which provides over \$1.7 billion annually for child protective services and other essential child welfare and human services.

The House and Senate budget resolutions propose between \$4.5 trillion to \$5.5 trillion in cuts. They keep in place the across-the-board cuts known as “sequestration” yet allow defense spending increases of more than \$90 billion. This means either the deficit goes up or critical human service programs like child welfare get cut.

Under one or both of these resolutions Congress proposes: to convert Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) into block grants; to repeal the Affordable Care Act; and to require severe cuts to mandatory spending which would likely include the elimination of the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG).

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) is a flexible block grant that was once an entitlement. It was turned into a capped block grant in 1981. Its funding level peaked at close to \$3 billion a year in the 1990s until it was temporarily reduced to \$2.3 billion in 1996 as part of welfare reform. Two years later, in 1998, the cuts to SSBG were increased and made permanent. At that time the funds were used to offset the cost of the Transportation Act and prevent the budget from slipping back into a deficit.

Despite being cut to \$1.7 billion, the deficits did come back and the transportation budget in recent years has relied

on general fund dollars. Since 1998 the deficit has gone up and funding for SSBG has gone down. In recent years some in Congress have proposed eliminating SSBG as a way to reduce the deficit.

The 2012 SSBG report from HHS shows how the \$1.7 billion in funding continues to support a range of child welfare services—especially as a prime funder of child protection. In addition it continues as a significant funder of domestic violence services, special services for the disabled, and a range of services for all ages including case management, prevention and intervention, and counseling services.

The 2012 report breaks out each state’s spending by 29 services both the direct SSBG funding and funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) which can be transferred into SSBG before being allocated.

Funds spent on *foster care* reached \$394 million in combined SSBG/TANF dollars with SSBG providing \$176 million. This is not an insignificant total when you consider states spent \$1.3 billion in maintenance payments through the main federal source of funding, Title IV-E foster care, in that same year.

Child Protective Services (CPS) received \$136 million in SSBG dollars and \$331 million when TANF funding is included. Dollars provided through SSBG either alone or combined with the TANF transfer far exceeds what the Congress appropriates through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) which continues to decrease and was down to \$25 million in FY 2015. SSBG also provides \$73 million in *prevention and intervention* services serving more than 2 million children in duplicated counts.

Outside of child welfare SSBG is a significant funder of *domestic violence services* at \$197 million (there are very few TANF transfer dollars in this category). Over a half million adults receive services which are essentially for domestic violence and elder abuse services. In recent years the single biggest recipient of SSBG funding category is for *special services for the disabled* at \$230 million from SSBG (\$307 million with TANF), serving over 270,000 children and 640,000 adults.

States vary in their uses, with some states passing through funding to their counties and as a result all 29 services receive some level of funding. Other states allocate funds to special service disabled populations, while others use SSBG as its single biggest funder of child protection and domestic violence. Still other states spread funding on a range of child welfare services to supplement other federal funding including foster care, child protection, counseling, information and referral, prevention and intervention, and special services disabled.

Legislation has not yet been introduced into the new 114th Congress but in the 112th and 113th congresses SSBG had been targeted for elimination through the budget process or as a funder for alternate services. There is an incentive to go after SSSBG because it is a mandatory block grant (an entitlement to the states) and its elimination would mean an immediate savings in the budget of \$1.7 billion for each year. Cuts in other benefit programs may not be realized for several years depending on how benefit changes are implemented. SSBG is also vulnerable since it is a block grant not tied to individually eligible people and generally many of the programs at the state and local level that benefit from it are not aware they receive SSBG dollars.

The Social Services Block Grant is a historical example of what happens when Congress converts an entitlement into a block grant. Its champions leave congress and the block grant is reduced.

Other Critical Programs

The severe budget cuts to domestic spending over the past few years have had an impact on key children's programs. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), the principal federal guidance regarding the protection of children and prevention of maltreatment, has been cut from more than \$27 million to \$25 million. The Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention fund has been reduced from \$42 million to \$40 million. Child Welfare Services which is intended to provide flexible funds for prevention and family support has been reduced to \$269 million, far below its high point of more than \$290 million in the early 1990s. Deficits have gone up while funding for these initiatives goes down.

CONCLUSION

To effectively provide a child welfare continuum of services: preventing child maltreatment, preventing the placement of children into foster care, assisting children in foster care, finding new families for children, supporting children and families post-placement, we cannot continue to cut and then freeze these programs. Efforts to balance the budget must be balanced in their approach and their impact.



John Sciamanna

410-533-5857 ■ jsciamanna@cwla.org

Tim Briceland-Betts

202-688-4154 ■ bricebet@cwla.org