Eighty-two groups Thursday call on Congress to pass a funding bill without delay, address human needs emergencies

Editor’s note: Executive Director Deborah Weinstein is available for interviews to discuss CHN’s letter to Congress and Congress’ action on budget issues.

Congress must approve a Continuing Resolution (CR) without divisive policy riders that covers as short a time period as possible, and follow it with a full-year appropriations bill before the end of the year, a broad and diverse coalition of 81 national organizations said Thursday.

The 81 groups signed a letter delivered to every member of Congress urging quick action on the budget as well as swift approval of funds for removal of lead poisoning in contaminated water systems, Zika response, and opioid addiction services. The groups represent a broad array of human needs and faith concerns, including housing, education and training, health, nutrition, child care, economic security, immigration, workplace fairness and other issues.

Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director of the Coalition on Human Needs, which circulated the letter, said Congress should do its job and finally respond to emergencies like lead poisoning and Zika. The letter to Congress says, “Failure to act so far has meant children and families have been subject to preventable harm. Further inaction would be grossly irresponsible.”

“We recognize that this is highly unlikely before the end of September, but hope that if you must resort to a Continuing Resolution (CR), you will make that stop-gap measure as temporary as possible, without divisive policy riders, and return after the election to enact omnibus appropriations legislation,” the letter states.

Weinstein added that if Congress does resort to a CR, it must also include increased appropriations where urgently needed – for example, in areas such as child care, Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security, housing assistance, elder nutrition and planning for the Census Bureau’s decennial census.

Note to media: A copy of the letter and a list of the 82 signees follow this news release.
September 8, 2016

Dear [Senator or Representative]:

The undersigned national organizations strongly urge you to complete work on an omnibus appropriations bill at the earliest possible date. We recognize that this is highly unlikely before the end of September, but hope that if you must resort to a Continuing Resolution (CR), you will make that stop-gap bill as temporary as possible, without divisive policy riders, and return after the election to enact omnibus appropriations legislation.

Some issues cannot wait months to be addressed. Congress must act in September to provide funds to prevent the spread of Zika, to assist communities to stop lead poisoning from contaminated water systems, and to provide treatment for the epidemic of opioid abuse. These are emergencies needing immediate attention. Failure to act so far has meant children and families have been subject to preventable harm. Further inaction would be grossly irresponsible.

Meeting these domestic needs ought to be Congress’ highest priority. If Congress also seeks to increase Pentagon spending, whether by increasing the uncapped Overseas Contingency Operations account or through defense appropriations, at least a like amount should be provided to address urgent domestic concerns. Retaining Congress’ commitment to parity in funding increases for defense and non-defense discretionary spending is needed now more than ever, when epidemics from disease, substance abuse and poisoning must be stopped.

Congress must also include increased appropriations in a Continuing Resolution in areas where it is urgently needed. Programs including child care, Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security operations, housing assistance, elder nutrition, and the Census Bureau’s decennial census planning must have enough funds to carry out their responsibilities. In these or other examples where failure to go beyond flat funding would seriously jeopardize services and/or increase costs in the long term, Congress should include anomalies in the September CR.

The organizations signing this letter include human service providers, faith organizations, and other policy experts and advocates concerned with housing, education and training, health, nutrition, child care, and many other services of importance to low-income people. We know how important it is for service providers to be able to plan for a full year and to have enough funds to meet current needs. That is why communities nationwide are depending on Congress to act in September to address urgent needs immediately and ensure ongoing funding with no divisive riders, and enact omnibus full-year appropriations shortly after the election.

Sincerely yours,

9to5
AFL-CIO
African American Health Alliance (AAHA)
African American Ministers in Action
AFSCME
AIDS United
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Association of Service Coordinators
American Farmworker Opportunity Programs
American Federation of Teachers
American Foundation for the Blind
Americans for Democratic Action
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Bend the Arc
Bread for the World
Campaign for America's Future
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Child Welfare League of America
Childcare Aware
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Leadership Council
Children's Mental Health Network
Church of the Brethren
Coalition For Health Funding
Coalition On Human Needs
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Council for Opportunity in Education
Doctors For America
Easter Seals, Inc.
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Families USA
Family Focus Treatment Association
First Focus
Food Research & Action Center
Friends Committee on National Legislation
General Board of Church & Society, United Methodist Church
Generations United
Justice in Aging
Leadership Conference on Women Religious
Leading Age
Love Community
Main Street Alliance
Meals on Wheels America
Mental Health America
Moms Rising
MoveOn
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
This list includes groups that signed after the letter was distributed to Congress.