

The Good, the Bad, and the Bitter

Statement by Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director

“Senate and House negotiators managed to include some important initiatives in the omnibus end-of-year funding package that will help millions of people withstand hunger and receive health care. More people will get help with home heating or cooling, urgently needed as temperatures plummet and home energy costs rise. There are increases for Head Start and child care. Without question, Congress should pass it.

“But because of the intransigence of Minority Leader McConnell and some in his caucus, a lot of good that could have been done for people nationwide was thwarted, and some of the good that was included was there only because other cuts were imposed. Priorities are askew; the Pentagon gets more than it asked for, well apart from funding intended for Ukraine. This is a Grinch-y approach to the nation’s needs.

“By insisting on ratcheting down human needs program funding (and celebrating what he called a [“substantial, real-dollar cut”](#) to domestic programs), Leader McConnell and some in his caucus forced unwise and painful cuts to the SNAP food program as the means of paying for more summer food aid for children when school is out. Anti-hunger advocates know how important



it is for children in low-income families to get enough to eat during the summer months when school meals are not available. It is simply wrong to cut short emergency SNAP benefits despite continuing high food price inflation to pay for children’s summer meals.

“It is extremely important that the omnibus bill allows one year of continuous Medicaid coverage for children. One year of coverage should also have been required for post-partum women, in the face of grim maternal mortality rates so disproportionately affecting Black women. The bill instead makes continuous post-partum coverage an option for states. We fear, based on states’ track record so far, that some states will not take up this option. It is a bad choice to pay for this vital extension of care by ending the emergency continuous Medicaid coverage now in effect earlier than would be required when the pandemic Public Health Emergency is terminated. Hospitals are filling up again, from COVID and other illnesses; emergency conditions are not completely behind us. We are very pleased to see a 60 percent increase in funding across HHS agencies outside of Medicaid to address the crisis in maternal mortality rates as well as continued increases to address substance use and mental health disorders.

“It is urgently necessary to avoid a Medicaid funding disaster for Puerto Rico and other territories, and we are relieved that the omnibus includes increased funding and higher federal match rates. We look forward to Puerto Rico and all the territories being included in the regular

federal Medicaid program, receiving the same match rates as the states – that would be simple justice.”

“Perhaps the bitterest disappointment is the refusal of Leader McConnell to negotiate the inclusion of improvements to the Child Tax Credit in this package. In just the last few weeks, advocates in CHN’s network sent Congress another 77,000 letters calling for reviving the expanded Credit, on top of a steady outpouring of support and favorable polling nationwide. The CTC reduced the number of children and families running out of food. It helps families pay for all their basic needs; it provides some security during a difficult time for millions of families. Ending the improvements means 19 million children will lose some or all of this help, disproportionately children of color and poor.

“The Coalition on Human Needs is grateful to the Biden Administration and the members of Congress who fought to include improvements to the Child Tax Credit, and who insisted that there be no corporate tax breaks without including the CTC. We thank those who have made it clear that they will continue to refuse to take up a package of corporate tax benefits without including this vital help for families with children in the coming year.

“We also appreciate that despite the opposition to human needs funding by Minority Leader McConnell, the overall increase in the omnibus for Labor-Health and Human Services-Education funding keeps pace with inflation. Some programs, such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant, well exceeded inflation (a 30 percent increase). Others, such as K-12 Title I education grants, were increased, but not as much as this year’s 7.1% inflation increase. In funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, there were increases in the Homeless Assistance Program (up \$420 million, to \$3.63 billion), and \$130 million for 11,700 new rental vouchers, but these expansions are far less than the current need.

“The richest people do make gains in the omnibus. Retirement benefits in the bill, while offering some help to people with modest incomes, will mostly help affluent people, who don’t need it and already receive hundreds of billions in retirement tax breaks. This was not paid for. Only where programs are of most benefit to people with the lowest incomes is there an insistence that similar aid is cut. This is short-sighted and wrong.”

To visit CHN's FY23 Appropriations Resource Library, which includes many of CHN groups' response to the Appropriations Package, please click [here](#). CHN is an alliance of national organizations working to promote public policies which address the needs of people with low incomes and other vulnerable populations. CHN's members include civil rights, religious, labor, and professional organizations and service providers and those concerned with the children, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

