

Allies for Independence Washington Insights

Week of February 19, 2024

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

Congress returns next with extraordinarily little time (again) to advance FY2024 appropriations. Both sides are still debating a path forward on high profile policy riders which House Republicans insist must be part of FY 2024 spending bills. These riders relate to abortion, guns, congressionally directed spending, and other issues. Senate leaders have repeatedly stated they do not have the votes to include such riders in their spending bills, which have been bipartisan compared to the partisan spending bills in the House.

Congress must pass four bills by March 1st and the remaining eight bills, which includes LHHS, by March 8th. It is still not clear if Congress will be able to do this, or if they can even avoid a government shutdown, given the tense dynamics between both parties over government funding. A growing number of House Republicans are coalescing around a plan to insist on a continuing resolution through the end of the fiscal year, which would trigger a one percent cut to federal spending.

We expect this issue to consume Congress over the next two weeks, which could even disrupt plans for President Biden's State of the Union scheduled for March 7th. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

ON THE RADAR

Washington State Long-Term Care Program Update

If you are following the long-term care space, you are aware of the effort in Washington State to establish a public long-term care insurance program. Last summer, Washington State began collecting a 0.58 percent payroll tax to fund the program. If enacted, the program would provide a maximum benefit of \$36,500 starting in 2026.

Critics of the program argue that workers should not be required to participate in the program, as higher income earners will pay more for the same benefit. They are pursuing a referendum, known as Initiative 2124, which would make participation in the Washington State long-term care benefit voluntary. In other words, employees or self-employed individuals would be given the opportunity to opt out of the insurance program at any time. This would be disastrous for the public long-term care insurance program, often seen

as a potential model for other states or nationwide.

If you are interested in reviewing Initiative 2124, please [click here](#). For more information on the WA Cares program, please [click here](#).

Stakeholders Praise Introduction of Credit for Caring Act

A large coalition of stakeholders celebrated the reintroduction of the Credit for Caring Act. This bill would provide up to a \$5,000 federal tax credit for eligible and working family caregivers. The bill is aimed at providing relief to working family caregivers who make great sacrifices to care for loved ones. More than 48 million Americans are caregivers who provide approximately \$600 billion in unpaid care each year. This hurts the economy and can lower one's career earnings during their highest earning potential years.

If you are interested in learning more about the legislation, please [click here](#).

Sen. Hassan, Tillis Introduce Connecting Caregivers to Medicare Act

A similar coalition of stakeholders lauded the introduction of the Connecting Caregivers to Medicare Act, which would increase outreach and education to Medicare beneficiaries and simplify access to information for family givers through the 1-800-MEDICARE hotline. The legislation would improve training to ensure that hotline operators provide appropriate resources and information to family caregivers as required. For more information on the legislation, please [click here](#).

ICYMI! Medicaid Access Rule at OMB: Will Biden Administration Finalize 80/20 Rule?

Last week, the "[Ensuring Access to Medicaid Services](#)" rule appeared at OMB, a sign that the rule may be nearing release. The proposed rule would require at least 80% of all Medicaid payments for specific HCBS services – homemaker services, home health aide services, and personal care services – must be spent on compensation for direct care workers to help address the direct care workforce crisis. The rule has been met with mixed reviews across the sector, as many entities note the challenges with complying with the rule while balancing the needs of seniors and nursing home staff. It is abundantly clear that something needs to be done to improve recruitment and retention of the direct care workforce, but there is mounting concern this would create more problems than it solves. We are closely following this rule and will provide updates once it is published.

Save the Date: May 2nd – Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium

Mark your calendars to join ACL on Thursday, May 2, 2024, for the 7th Annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium! This free, all-day, virtual event will feature an engaging plenary, informative sessions, and a diverse array of topics addressing the most pressing needs in older adult mental health. For more information, please [click here](#)!

RECOMMENDED READS

- *Penn Live* – [Telehealth can eliminate the stigma blocking many youth from seeking help for mental illness](#)

- *Wisconsin Public Radio* – [Wisconsin’s nursing home industry could struggle with new federal staffing requirements](#)
 - *New York Times* – [When a Spouse Goes to the Nursing Home](#)
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Allies for Independence promotes inclusion, equity, and economic security across the lifespan!

Contact us!

For questions, please contact

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