

NCAF Summary of Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) Reauthorization Bills

The Weatherization reauthorization bills in the House and the Senate, H.R. 2041 and S. 983, have both been reported out of committee for full House and Senate consideration. The House and Senate bills are stand-alone pieces of legislation, meaning they are not presented to Congress as part of a package containing other similar bills. Both the House and Senate bills are likely to pass in September.

Differently than bills considered in previous Congresses, these bills include many of NCAF's proposals, which were refined through years of consultation with local Weatherization delivery agencies. These changes are the most likely to make the Weatherization program easier to run and utilize 21st century technology and science. Please note, for purposes of simplicity, we will refer to the House and Senate companion bills as "the bill" or "the legislation." The two bills are largely the same except where as noted. Listed below are the changes of the greatest importance to local WAP agencies in the new legislation.

1. First and foremost, the bill includes a five year reauthorization for Weatherization. The funding level in the House bill begins at \$290 million, which is a 12 percent increase over current funds and is the amount included in the FY2020 House appropriations bill. Funding increases to \$350 million in the final year. The Senate bill provides \$350 million for FY2020 through FY2024. However, we expect the Senate will adopt the House funding levels.
2. Administrative funds will be increased from 10 percent to 15 percent, which is a step in the right direction.
3. The bill removes old statutory barriers to solar energy and affirms that any renewable energy technology will be treated as any other weatherization measure that is evaluated on its savings-to-investment ratio (SIR).
4. Once the bill becomes law, DOE may re-examine the way the SIR is calculated by including benefits such as health or safety when a crew is choosing which measures to use in a house. Weatherization's statutory objectives are threefold: reduce energy bills, improve the health of residents and improve the safety of residents. Under current law, we only can measure one outcome -- bill savings. NCAF has advocated that

accounting for health and safety outcomes is needed, but we need to be sure energy benefits remain the primary goal.

5. Under the new legislation, language prohibiting re-weatherizing a home has changed in two important ways:
 - a. Currently, WAP cannot serve any home weatherized after September 30, 1993. When enacted, only homes weatherized in the previous 15 years will be barred from receiving full WAP services. NCAF strongly advocated for this imperative element of flexibility; and,
 - b. Programs will be authorized to use DOE funds to work with the residents of any homes that local agencies have weatherized to provide related services and education, but not install full weatherization and major measures. The Senate bill formally defines these as “interim services.” DOE will set the final policy outlining what work in recently weatherized homes will be covered by WAP funds. NCAF persuaded the committees that it is imperative for agencies to give continuous assistance to residents. This allows residents to understand their bills more clearly and use and maintain their equipment properly.
6. The Senate bill contains a provision NCAF considers essential to making local utility-WAP partnerships work more effectively. The bill authorizes DOE to waive WAP regulations that make combining federal and private funds difficult as long as the benefits of the combined investments will be equal to or higher than if WAP regulations were followed. NCAF will be pressing to have the House Committee adopt the Senate language before final passage.

Additional helpful changes in the House bill that were proposed by allies include:

1. Requirements that ensure the hiring of workers from underrepresented groups in the energy performance workforce;
2. The counting and reporting of multi-family buildings with weatherized units. This change is important to our allies leading affordable housing organizations. If this becomes law, the number of apartments and the number of buildings containing those apartments will both be reported. We worked with these same allies on aligning eligibility levels and

sharing information with HUD and USDA programs, but, unfortunately, provisions addressing these issues would tie the bill up in two additional committees. However, we have commitments from appropriators to work on interagency coordination issues through appropriations' report language.

Further changes to the bill include a competitive grant program for innovations. All WAP organizations and many other categories of non-profit groups are eligible to compete for funds that DOE will be required to reserve for the purpose of funding projects that test potential approaches to WAP and related activities. DOE can issue rules that are more selective than the wide range of potential purposes listed in the bill. If funding for WAP exceeds \$260 million, 4% of funding will be set aside for projects. At \$300 million of funding, 6% will be set aside. NCAF worked diligently with lawmakers to ensure this program included current WAP organizations and did not take more than 4 to 6 percent of funding from the core program.

Additionally, WAP champion Congressman David McKinley (R-WV-1) insisted that the innovation grant program sunset when this authorization ends. This means the grant program could not continue to be funded by Congress without reauthorization five years after this bill is enacted. The core program, however, could continue to be funded by Congress regardless of authorization status.