



COMMITTEE *on* APPROPRIATIONS

CHAIRWOMAN BARBARA A. MIKULSKI

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN MIKULSKI AT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES FY 2015 OVERSIGHT AND BUDGET HEARING

Says HHS must improve health care access and services for children and disadvantaged communities

WASHINGTON—U.S. Senator **Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.)**, Chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, participated in a Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Subcommittee hearing on the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2015.

Senator Mikulski's statement, as prepared for delivery, follows:

“Today we are here to discuss the Fiscal Year 2015 budget request for the Department of Health and Human Services. I would like to thank Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Moran who worked so hard to enact the 2014 Omnibus. By negotiating with their House counterparts, we were able to ensure HHS would no longer have to operate under a continuing resolution or sequestration.

“This hearing is part of the Senate Appropriation Committee’s mission to hold more than 60 hearings in a span of six weeks and to complete all of our appropriations work by October 1st. We will begin the process of marking up our bills on May 22, and hope to consider this subcommittee’s bill sometime in June.

“It saddens me to acknowledge that this will be the last LHHS appropriations bill authored by Senator Harkin. However, it should also inspire us to get the LHHS bill to the Senate Floor for the first time in seven years. It would be a fitting way to pay tribute to Senator Harkin, who has either Chaired or served as the Ranking Member of this subcommittee for the past two decades.

“I look forward to hearing from our panel of witnesses, which represent HHS’ Administration for Children & Families (ACF); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

“I hope all of you touch on how the Health and Human Services’ budget will help to create jobs and support innovation, while protecting the public’s health and providing kids with quality health care, child care and a jump start on education.

“Mr. Greenberg, I will want to discuss two areas of ACF’s budget request with you: Child Care Development Block Grants (CCDBG) and Unaccompanied Alien Children.

“Senator Burr and I worked together on a bipartisan reauthorization of the CCDBG program that followed regular order and had an open amendment process on the Senate floor. We were able to make important reforms that improved the quality of care children receive. I was thrilled to see our bill pass with overwhelming bipartisan support and a vote of 96-2.

“I appreciate that your FY15 request increases funding levels for CCDBG, but additional funding will still be needed to ensure that the reforms in our bill are implemented effectively. Kids must be taken off waiting lists and provided with the child care they deserve.

“While your requests for CCDBG give reason for optimism, I am very disappointed with the budget you have requested to tackle the issue of Unaccompanied Alien Children. You have asked for level funding even though you had to transfer millions of dollars to this program in FY14 in order to fulfill your needs.

“I am worried because these are some of our most vulnerable children. They have left their countries and travelled thousands of miles to enter the U.S., often fleeing violence to avoid becoming victims of abuse or organized crime.

“Their journey here is often riddled with danger – these kids put their life, health and safety in jeopardy. Along the way, they risk being subjected to trafficking and the violence they were attempting to escape. These brave children deserve our consideration.

“On April 22, I convened a bipartisan, bicameral staff level meeting with various federal agencies that are responsible for these unaccompanied alien children. We learned that the number of unaccompanied children entering the United States is rising.

“In FY12 there were 14,000. In FY13 there were 25,000 and that number is projected to balloon to 60,000 for FY14. This issue is not going away – we expect tens of thousands more to enter the country in FY15 – and we need to keep these children in mind when appropriating our resources.

“What I need from you is a better estimate of the budget you will need to provide these kids with proper services so you don’t have to transfer funds in the future.

“Dr. Frieden, as America’s chief public health officer, I look forward to hearing your plans for new and existing initiatives.

“How do you plan to continue the creation of blue zones, which were supported by \$80 million in Community Prevention Grants?

“I hope you will delve into how you plan use the \$45 million in funding to improve global health security. What will your approach be in helping other countries build and strengthen their own Centers for Disease Control as well as improve early detection and response to epidemics?”

“You have also requested \$30 million to combat antibiotic resistance by quickly identifying deadly microbes and use common sense practices to protect patients from infection. I encourage you to work with Dr. Peter Pronovost of Johns Hopkins, his checklist has proven very effective in reducing central line infections.

“Lastly Dr. Frieden, I am keen to hear more about the \$16 million budgeted to address prescription painkiller abuse.

“Administrator Wakefield, I look forward to hearing about your work to strengthen the health care work force and increase the number of primary care doctors, nurses, pediatricians and dental providers in underserved communities.

“I am also interested in hearing how communities, families and patients are benefiting from the additional funding dedicated to health reform and community health centers.

“Finally, Mr. Love, I have particular interest in CMS because it employs over 4,200 in my home state of Maryland. CMS does important work to process Medicare claims, increases access to health insurance, prevent fraud and abuse, help states expand their Medicaid programs, support new health care delivery innovations and implement health care reform.

“I want to hear how this budget will enable you to fulfill those crucial responsibilities. I also want to know what specific plans you have to increase health insurance enrollment, improve the functionality and operation of the federal health insurance exchange and help states expand their own Medicaid programs.

“I understand that there are some proposals in this budget that will not be universally supported across the aisle – that’s the nature of any bill or budget. We all have things we like and things we don’t like, but we must try to refrain from making any one issue a ‘deal breaker.’”

“It is my hope, however, that we can work together to come to an agreement. I think we all recognize that sequesters and continuing resolutions are not an effective way to run a federal agency like the Department of Health and Human Services. Our nation is better off when we work together and govern together.”

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