



A SHORT GUIDE TO THE FEDERAL APPROPRIATIONS TIMELINE AND PROCESS

- **Overview**

The US Constitution requires all government spending bills to originate in the US House of Representatives. House spending bills generally respond to proposals from the current Administration (the President). Senate spending bills then respond to the House.

The House and Senate Appropriations (appropriations = funding) Committees provide funding for the authorized Federal programs and agencies and oversee the use of those funds. The House and Senate have 13 Appropriations Subcommittees.

- **How do the Budget Committees and Appropriations Committees Differ?**

The Budget Committees determine overall discretionary spending levels for Congress. The Appropriations Committees determine spending allocations for each of the 13 subcommittees.

- **Why is it Important to Understand the Federal Appropriations Process?**

Each year, the Federal Appropriations process must occur to keep the Federal Government up and running. It is not enough for Congress to enact legislation (such as the Developmental Disabilities Act). Congress – through the appropriations process, must also fund legislation so that various programs and projects can continue.

- **What is the Appropriations Process, in general?**

The path of an appropriations bill is as follows:

1. **INTRODUCTION:** Each Subcommittee chair writes an appropriations bill and introduces it to Congress. In our case, the relevant Subcommittees are the **House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee** and the **Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee**. The current House Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee Chair is **Representative Ralph Regula (R-OH)** and the current Senate Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee Chair is **Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA)**.

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2. **HEARINGS:** The House and Senate Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittees listen to constituent concerns and to the Administration's priorities. Constituents and advocacy organizations like NACDD may request an opportunity to testify during public witness hearings. Since the opportunity to testify is quite competitive and limited, constituents and advocacy organizations must always submit written testimony to the Subcommittees and include their funding requests for the current fiscal year.
3. **MARK-UP:** Subcommittee Members work on drafts of their appropriations bills to reflect their funding priorities – they “mark up” the draft until it is final. During this process, Members also draft report language that will accompany their appropriations bill. Report language explains their priorities in more detail and provides direction to Federal Agencies (such as the Administration on Developmental Disabilities).
4. **COMMITTEE VOTES:** The Appropriations Subcommittees vote on the final bill and pass it on to the full Appropriations Committees. The Appropriations Committees can make changes to the Subcommittee bills before voting and passing the bill for action on the House or Senate floor.
5. **FLOOR VOTE:** The Appropriations bills are considered on the floor of the House or Senate.

- **What is the Timeline for the Federal Appropriations Process and What Should Advocates Be Doing When?**

- In **early January**, when Congress returns from the holiday recess and a new session of Congress begins, NACDD (with input from Members and the Public Policy Team) should begin to make phone calls to our sister organizations to reach agreement on our appropriations request for the fiscal year and to achieve critical organizational support from our colleagues (e.g., National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, the ARC/UCP Public Policy Collaboration, AAMR).
- NACDD Government Relations staff should prepare an NACDD Appropriations Fact Sheet and seek sign-on support from our sister organizations and Member Councils.
- NACDD Government Relations staff should make phone calls to every Member of the House and Senate Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittees to schedule an appointment to discuss our funding priorities.
- NACDD should urge grassroots advocates to begin pushing for our funding request in **late February and early March**. Grassroots involvement should begin just prior to our annual public policy conference in March, in preparation for Hill visits during the conference.

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- Usually in **February**, NACDD Government Relations staff should submit a written request to the Subcommittee Co-chairs in the House and Senate to ask for the opportunity to have a witness testify during the public hearings. Hearings usually take place in **March or early April**.
- If an opportunity to testify is not granted, (again, this is competitive) then written testimony should be submitted to be included in the written record. Written testimony usually is due in **mid-April**.
- At some point in **late March or early April** (sometimes even in early May – the timing changes year-to-year) our funding request letters are due to the Appropriations Subcommittees by a certain date. Subcommittee Members then submit their own requests into the Subcommittee Chairs and the Subcommittee Chairs submit their requests to the full Appropriations Committees.
- After the funding request letters have been sent into the Appropriations Subcommittees, there will be a period of “down-time” that may continue into July. Once the budget parameters have been agreed upon by the House and Senate and the Appropriations Subcommittees, then mark-ups are held (see above). At this point, another grassroots advocacy push needs to occur (phone calls, faxes and visits) with pivotal offices.
- The mark-ups and final budgets by both the House and Senate should be finalized by the **end of July** and the final ironing out of differences between the House and Senate appropriations bills should occur in **September** when Congress returns from the August recess. Often, though, this process does not occur on time.
- After the mark-ups, the House and Senate go to Conference to iron out the differences in their appropriations bills. Inevitably, one Chamber will have provided more money for programs within the Developmental Disabilities Act than the other will. When this occurs, a final grassroots advocacy push needs to occur and advocates need to urge Conferees to go with the higher number.
- At the end of the Appropriations process, thank you letters must be sent to Senators, Representatives, and staffers who have been receptive to our requests. This process should be wrapped up by **October**, but often continues months later.

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