Congressional Committee Moves to Lift Needle Exchange Ban, End Abstinence-Only Funds

December 9, 2009

A combined fiscal year 2010 spending bill including provisions to lift the 20-year-old ban on using federal funding for needle exchange programs has worked its way through a House and Senate appropriations conference committee and is expected to move to the House of Representatives floor by tomorrow, December 10. The legislation must then pass the Senate before President Barack Obama can sign it into law.

In addition to lifting the federal needle exchange ban, the committee also eliminated a House of Representatives rider restricting needle exchanges from operating within 1,000 feet of schools, day care centers or other locations where children might congregate.

“We are pleased the Congress is prioritizing evidence over ideology by supporting this proven HIV and hepatitis prevention intervention that does not increase drug use,” Carl Schmid, deputy executive director of the AIDS Institute, said in a statement. “Our government will now have an additional tool that it can use to prevent HIV/AIDS in our country.”

The committee agreed with Obama’s call to end funding for abstinence-only sexual education programs and to instead back a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative that will support evidence-based programs and other approaches—including abstinence—to reduce teen pregnancies.

For the federal Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program—which provides care, treatment and support for low-income HIV-positive people—conferees proposed a 2.3 percent increase of $52.5 million, which is close to the $54 million requested by the president. This will increase funding to AIDS drug assistance programs (ADAP) by $20 million.

The committee also approved a $25 million increase for the Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) program and a $692 million increase for the National Institutes of Health.

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