



CCCBHA Blog by Rusty Selix

What Happens Next in Washington

It's hard to think about anything beyond the president's unbelievably offensive statements made on Tuesday in response to the Charlottesville protests and Neo-Nazi terrorist attack that killed one woman and injured many. The statements were broadly condemned by both Republican and Democrat congressional leaders but what impact will this have on policy? Even before these recent inflammatory statements there was growing discomfort between the president and many senate republicans which should reduce the White House's ability to exert pressure on individual Senators. However, it is unclear whether this will have any impact on what happens.

The Trump administration continues its war on drugs, affirmative action and attack on immigrants, but none of these issues have been presented for congressional action. Congress is in recess until after Labor Day and very few Congressional Republicans have held town hall meetings. Those that did have encountered overwhelming objections to their health care proposals which failed to pass the Senate last month.

When Congress returns, the focus will apparently be on tax reform. There will be efforts to cut Medicaid because those cuts can be scored as budget savings which makes it politically easier to lower taxes as Republican leaders will want to do. Most of our concerns will be back on the table and we must resume our advocacy, focusing mainly on the 14 California Republican House members. While all 14 voted for the "repeal and replace" bill in May, it does not mean they will vote for Medicaid cuts when it is not part of a repeal of the Affordable Care Act - a campaign pledge for nearly all Republican members of Congress. There is a bipartisan effort to stabilize the health exchange markets, but there is a lot of uncertainty about where the White House stands on that concept - as well as what it may do on its own to stabilize or destabilize the health exchanges which are dependent upon federal subsidies.

As before, something very bad could emerge from the House which might not have the votes needed in the Senate which serves as a moderating force. Our work is not done and we cannot assume losing significant federal support for behavioral health is no longer a threat.

Strong Economy Boosts Revenues

We have a long way to go this fiscal year, but with the stock market hitting an all-time high, real estate increasing, and Silicon Valley leading the way, we should have a strong year for state and county revenues, especially for Mental Health Services Act funding which tends to rise almost perfectly in sync with the stock market. This time of the year, state agencies need to start developing budget proposals for 2018-19 and there could be a budget surplus that agencies can propose to expend.

Counties should receive more revenue than assumed when they adopted their budgets but that may not matter until they do their 2018-19 budgets. We have expressed concerns many times about the budget assumptions and limitations that county budget departments have imposed upon behavioral health departments, who seem to have no say in how those calculations are made. We will continue with our efforts to get state officials to provide better guidance and longer term revenue forecasts as we continue to hear of counties setting EPSDT spending caps and MHSAs budgets that don't account for all the revenues that could be made available.

AB 1250- Jones-Sawyer - Destroys Behavioral Health System

AB 1250 is the bill that will make it impossible for counties to contract out nearly all behavioral health services even though 70 percent of services are currently done by private providers. The bill is currently pending in the Senate Appropriations Committee. As announced in prior communications from CCCBHA, we expect the bill to go on the Suspense file. If that happens the Committee will vote on the bill on Sept. 1. If approved, both houses of legislature must then agree by Sept. 15 to send it to the governor for final action.

There has never been a bill this devastating to our system, as it would put most community agencies out of business outside Santa Clara County. In addition, cities including San Francisco and Berkeley are exempted for political reasons. Everyone who cares about behavioral health should be alarmed about this bill and voice out their opposition by contacting legislators.

Visit the links below to find out more about the devastating AB 1250 bill:

StopAB1250.com

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