

# 2011 Proposed Spending Cuts and the Appropriations Process: Update and Action Steps

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In January 2011, Republicans took control of the U.S. House of Representatives, having promised to make significant cuts to federal spending in the Fiscal Year 2011 budget and beyond. Most widely touted was a promise to reduce federal non-defense discretionary spending to 2008 levels, a move which would reduce federal spending by about \$100 billion. However, with five months of FY 2011 already past, the House leadership appears to be favoring a pro-rated figure of \$55-60 billion in cuts for the remainder of the fiscal year. If enacted, such cuts could have a significant impact on federal spending for behavioral health programs. **Yet, the outcome of the budget process is still far from certain. Get the answers to your questions and learn how to take action against cuts to the behavioral health safety net here.**

## **What is the status of the FY 2011 budget?**

During the last session of Congress, lawmakers were unable to reach agreement on the 12 spending bills that make up each year's budget. When FY 2011 began on Oct. 1, 2010, Congress passed a series of continuing resolutions (CR) to keep the government operating at 2010 funding levels while legislators worked out a deal on 2011 spending. The CR that is now funding the federal government will expire on March 4. Lawmakers must either pass a budget or enact another CR before then, or the government will be forced to shut down. The House leadership has proposed a stopgap CR that would include cuts of at least \$55-60 billion in non-defense discretionary spending for the remaining 7 months of the fiscal year. The proposed CR is expected to be released on Feb. 14, the same week that President Obama will release his 2012 budget. No further details about the proposal – including any specific proposed cuts or target spending levels – have been released.

## **What will happen when President Obama introduces his FY 2012 budget?**

House Appropriations Committee chairman Harold Rogers (R-KY) told the Capitol Hill news publication Congressional Quarterly that the proposed CR is only the first move in what he expects to be “the largest series of spending cuts in history.” The Republican House majority has continued to promote its proposal to reduce non-defense discretionary spending to 2008 levels and is likely to make a strong push to do so in the 2012 budget. Recently adopted House rules for consideration of the budget would allow members to introduce amendments to slash spending even farther below this benchmark.

## **What is “non-defense discretionary spending?” What programs would be at risk if these cuts became law?**

This term refers to funding for all federal programs that are not part of the defense budget and are not considered entitlement programs. Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security are entitlement programs and would be exempt from cuts; however, other federal programs that fund important health services are considered discretionary and could be at risk. Examples include (but are not limited to): programs funded by the Mental Health Block Grant and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant; the Primary Care-Behavioral Health Integration Grant; the Public Health and Prevention Fund, and more.

**How would these proposed cuts affect SAMHSA programs if they were to be enacted?**

Returning to 2008 spending levels could result in significant cuts to programs administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, including: a \$62 million reduction in Center for Mental Health Services Programs of National and Regional Significance; a \$20 million reduction to the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant; a \$53 million reduction to the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment Programs of National and Regional Significance; and a \$7 million reduction to the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention Programs of National and Regional Significance.

**Are the proposed cuts likely to become law?**

Any proposed cuts must be approved by both the House and the Senate before they can take effect. With Democrats in control of the Senate, it is unknown at this point how the Republican leadership's proposals will fare. A CR with such a level of spending reductions is certain to be opposed by large numbers of legislators in the House and Senate, especially once cuts to specific agencies or programs are announced. Reducing the entire federal budget to 2008 levels is also certain to encounter significant opposition in the Senate. It is too soon to tell whether House Republicans will achieve any or all of their spending cut goals.

**What can I be doing right now to fight cuts to the behavioral health safety net?**

The National Council encourages you to reach out to your members of Congress and share with them the importance of fully funding the behavioral health safety net. Many members of Congress were newly elected this year and may not yet have a good understanding of the important work that community behavioral health centers do in their home states and districts. Funding the behavioral health safety net is not only the right thing to do for vulnerable individuals in need; it also saves money by preventing costly hospitalizations, incarcerations, and other adverse outcomes. The National Council has created a [template email](#) you can use to contact your members of Congress and share your thoughts about the importance of the community behavioral health safety net. We encourage you to personalize your message to give it extra impact – tell your own story about why behavioral health matters. We also encourage all member organizations to invite your member of Congress to visit your site and have a chance to meet some of your consumers and staff. Our [Post-Election Toolkit](#) offers template letters and tips for reaching out to your elected officials. Although no votes on the budget have yet been scheduled, now is the time to start acquainting your members of Congress with the important work that you do. This is particularly important for organizations whose legislators sit on the influential House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Reaching out and establishing a relationship now will pay off later when specific cuts are being considered.

**Where can I learn about the latest news and updates on this issue?**

The National Council will continue to keep you updated as Congress debates these proposed spending cuts. Stay tuned to our [Public Policy Update](#) and [Action Alerts](#) for the most up-to-date information and opportunities to get involved.

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