



August 6, 2014

Dear AJFCA Members,

Congressional recesses provide an excellent opportunity for you to visit your legislators and their staff in their home offices (or invite them to your own agencies), reintroduce yourselves, and talk about your agency's priorities.

Congress has left D.C. for its "summer work period" and will be home now through Labor Day. For scheduling purposes, Senators/Representatives can be reached in their district/state offices or through the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. At these meetings, your goal should be to educate them about the make-up and needs of your community.

In addition to your own communal priorities, we encourage you to ask your Members of Congress to support the **Emergency Food and Shelter Program, needy Holocaust Survivors, the ABLE (Achieving a Better Experience) Act, and funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to address unaccompanied children at our border**. These issues are all likely to be addressed by Congress during the remainder of the legislative session and are extremely important to the national Jewish community and the vulnerable people we serve.

### **The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)**

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program remains a ground-breaking and unique public-private partnership possessing a long-history of bipartisan-bicameral support in Congress and with a positive track record of success. Our network played an important role in the program's inception more than 30 year ago and continue to play a major role in its administration, nationally and locally, ever since. Despite the importance of EFSP to millions of households across the country struggling with the prolonged economic recovery, the changing dynamics in Congress, coupled with the tough spending limitations imposed on the federal budget, have made the program susceptible to funding cuts.

In June, the Senate Appropriations Committee recommended funding the EFSP program in FY 2015 at \$100 million which would constitute a \$20 million cut and reduce the program's allocation to its lowest level in 16-years. In contrast, the House Appropriations Committee recommended that Congress maintain the current \$120 million level of EFSP funding. With competing funding recommendations, the House and Senate will have to eventually agree on a final spending level for EFSP.

- Please urge your Senators and Representatives to support the House Appropriations Committee's recommended EFSP funding level of \$120 million for FY 2015. Please

click [here](#) for a template letter for your use in advocacy for this program. This letter will also serve as talking points when speaking to your Members of Congress or their staff.

### **Holocaust Survivor Assistance Fund**

The President's FY 2015 budget proposal included \$5 million for the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Fund. This is an important aspect of the RUSH Initiative – Responding Urgently to Survivors of the Holocaust. Housed at the Administration for Community Living in the Department of Health and Human Services, the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Fund would leverage private fundraising in a 3:1 ratio with nonprofits, foundations, and the private sector to address the needs of the Survivor population.

The House of Representatives has not yet acted on the Labor-Health and Human Services appropriations bill, but 60 members of Congress signed a [letter](#) to House Appropriators in support of this fund. The Senate Appropriations Committee also has not passed its Labor-HHS bill, and while an initial subcommittee markup included [report language](#) on this, it did not include this funding.

- Please ask your Senators and Representatives to include the \$5 million Holocaust Survivor Assistance Fund in any final Appropriations package for FY 2015.

### **ABLE Act**

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, with 365 House cosponsors and 74 Senate cosponsors, is one of the most widely supported pieces of legislation in Congress. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to see if your Representative and Senators are cosponsors. After a recent hearing in the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Taxation and IRS Oversight, the ABLE Act is gaining momentum and hopefully will be voted on (and enacted) before the end of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. The ABLE Act cleared the House Ways & Means Committee unanimously on July 31st.

Current law discourages people with disabilities and their families from saving for the future, as people with disabilities who have more than \$2000 in assets are ineligible for many essential government benefits, including Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income. The ABLE Act seeks to rectify this by encouraging and assisting people with disabilities and their families to save money through a tax-advantaged account for disability-related expenses that will supplement, but not supplant, benefits provided through private insurance, the Medicaid program, the Supplemental Security Income program, the beneficiary's employment and other sources. Qualified expenses would include education, housing, transportation, employment support, health prevention and wellness, assistive technology and personal support.

- Please thank your Senators and Representatives for their support and urge them to tell Congressional leaders to bring the ABLE Act to the floor of their respective chamber during this Congress to help people with disabilities and their families save for their long-term care needs.

## Office of Refugee Resettlement

An estimated 80-90,000 unaccompanied alien children (UACs) are expected to cross the southern border of the United States by the end of the current fiscal year. The Office of Refugee Resettlement has had to reprogram \$94 million to deal with the influx of unaccompanied minors. As a result, funds have been diverted from regular resettlement operations including many programs that Jewish agencies use to resettle refugees fleeing Iran, Iraq, Syria, Burma or Sudan. AJFCA has signed this [statement](#) and is advocating for increased funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to adequately assist the children fleeing violence without detracting from our ability to serve existing vulnerable refugees.

- Please urge your Senators and Representatives to support the Emergency Supplemental request for \$1.83 billion for the Office of Refugee Resettlement for FY 2014, and support \$3.367 billion for the Office of Refugee Resettlement for FY 2015. Thank you to our friends at HIAS for supplying this [sample letter and action alert](#).

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity during Congress' summer recess to showcase the valuable service your agencies provide for the community. If you have any questions on our summer advocacy plan or to learn more about any of these pieces of legislation, please contact me.

Best wishes for a happy summer!



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