

# Disability Policy News

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## **FY26 Appropriations**

Both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees have marked up their Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bills and passed them out of committee. To avoid a government shutdown, Congress must approve a new government funding package for FY26 by September 30 (when the government funding year ends) or pass a Continuing Resolution (CR) that keeps the government operating on current funding levels for a specified period. It appears Congress will be unable to finish passing full-year appropriations in that time. Therefore, CRs have been introduced by both parties, both of which fund the government at the previous fiscal year's spending levels with some changes to policy and new spending.

**Republicans:** [House Republicans](#) released a CR to extend government funding through November 21, which they approved by a vote of 217-212 on September 19. It is a relatively "clean" CR, which adds \$30 million additional funding for lawmaker security and \$58 million in additional security for the Supreme Court and the executive branch. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) released a [statement](#) opposing the CR, saying it wouldn't address the looming increase in health insurance premiums when the Affordable Care Act tax credits expire. Representative [Rosa DeLauro](#) (D-CT) and Senator [Patty Murray](#) (D-WA), Ranking Members of their respective chambers' Appropriations Committees, released statements of

opposition as well, and said that they had been working with Appropriations Chairs Representative Tom Cole (R-OK) and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) on bipartisan legislation, and were interested in returning to those negotiations.

**Democrats:** Congressional Democrats also released a CR to extend government funding through October 31. It [would reverse](#) the Medicaid cuts in H.R.1 (the “One Big, Beautiful Bill Act” passed into law by Republicans through the reconciliation process), permanently extend the ACA premium tax credits, and provide nearly \$200 million for security for Members of Congress and \$140 million for security for federal courts, among other policies. *See the House Democrats’ bill [here](#) and the Senate Democrats’ bill [here](#).*

### **Key Takeaways**

The expiring ACA tax credits have been a source of contention between Democrats and Republicans in Congress. Democrats established enhanced Affordable Care Act tax credits under the American Rescue Plan, which [increased](#) enrollment in ACA Marketplaces. The enhanced provision made more people eligible for the tax credits and increased the amount of tax credits. The enhanced version will expire on December 31, and their expiration could result in millions more uninsured people and higher premiums. *Learn more from KFF [here](#).*

**Action Items** – Contact your Member of Congress and remind them that disability programs need to be funded when full-year appropriations are eventually negotiated between the House and Senate.

If you met with staff in the last several months, emailed them, or hosted a Member of Congress, send a thank you. You can find your House Representative [here](#) and your Senators [here](#), including their contact information.

### **Plain Language**

Congress needs to pass a government spending bill to make sure the government is funded in 2026. Before Congress can vote on that bill, committees in the House and Senate need to first review it. This is a process called a markup and the committees are called appropriations committees. Appropriations means money that is set aside by Congress for

a particular use. The appropriations process happens once a year. Money is sometimes requested by the President's Administration or by Congress for a specific use.

Right now, Congress is in the middle of its appropriations process for 2026 funding. The Senate and the House both have committees that work on appropriations. Within those committees, they have special groups (called subcommittees) that focus on how much money government programs get. The Senate and House Appropriations Committee passed their 2026 appropriations bills but they haven't finished this process. Congress needs to pass a government funding bill by September 30, which does not give them a lot of time. This is why Members of Congress are going to pass a Continuing Resolution or a "CR." A CR is a funding bill that makes sure the government has enough money for a few more months. It gives Members of Congress a little more time to finish their full year appropriations bill.

Republicans in the House of Representatives introduced a CR that Democrats in Congress didn't like. On September 19, the House passed this CR. Democrats in the House and Senate introduced their own CR.

Many people are able to pay less for healthcare every month because of something called "tax credits." The Affordable Care Act has special tax credits that will end on December 31, 2025. Democrats want to make sure that people can still use these tax credits in the future so they can save money and afford healthcare. Their CR includes a piece that makes those tax credits last forever.

**Action Items** – You should contact your Member of Congress and remind them that disability programs need money in the full year 2026 appropriations bill. If you met with staff from Congress in the last several months, emailed with them, or hosted a Member of Congress, send a thank you. You can find your House Representative [here](#) and your Senators [here](#), including their contact information.

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## **Congressional Hearings**

**Senate HELP CDC Hearing** – On Wednesday, September 17, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing entitled "[Restoring Trust Through Radical Transparency: Reviewing Recent Events at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and](#)

**Implications for Children's Health.**" The hearing featured witnesses Dr. Susan Monarez, former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director, and Dr. Deb Houry, the former Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Director for Program and Science at CDC. It centered on the recent events at CDC and Secretary Kennedy's recent actions potentially undermining health and safety during his time at HHS. **Dr. Monarez was fired** by Secretary Kennedy and **Dr. Houry resigned** subsequently.

Dr. Monarez testified that Secretary Kennedy had asked her to preapprove vaccine recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and fire career scientists at CDC. She had refused to do so and alleged that her refusal was the reason why Secretary Kennedy fired her. She **was fired** after only a month in the position. Senate HELP Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) has **invited** Secretary Kennedy to testify and respond to Dr. Monarez's and Dr. Houry's claims.

**Senate HELP K-12 Education** – On Thursday, September 18, the Senate HELP Committee held a hearing entitled "**The State of K-12 Education.**" The hearing mainly centered on improving test scores, attendance, and student engagement.

### **Key Takeaways**

**Senate HELP CDC Hearing** – Numerous Senators on both sides of the aisle emphasized their concern about the changes being made to the childhood vaccine schedule, and the way that changes were being made. Drs. Monarez and Houry both testified that they were concerned that Secretary Kennedy was undermining public health and making changes to the agency that would leave the U.S. less prepared for the next pandemic. They were also concerned that preventable diseases—like polio, measles, and diphtheria—might return because of the Secretary's actions. Dr. Monarez testified that, at various points in her tenure, Secretary Kennedy had told her not to speak with Senators and not to engage with career scientists at CDC.

The White House has said that Monarez wasn't aligned with HHS' agenda. Secretary Kennedy testified about changes at the CDC at a Senate Finance Committee hearing on September 4. **During that hearing**, in addition to Democratic lawmakers on the panel, **several Republican Senators** (including Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA), John Barrasso (R-WY),

and Thom Tillis (R-NC)) pushed Secretary Kennedy on his negative assertions about the efficacy of vaccines.

**Senate HELP K-12 Education** – Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) mentioned the difficulties that Wisconsin schools have had in filling special education teacher vacancies, saying that in February, the Administration cut a grant program that would train special education teachers in public schools because that program included language referring to “diversity, equity, and inclusion” or “DEI.” Additionally, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) raised the issue of how Medicaid cuts in H.R.1 (the reconciliation bill or “One Big, Beautiful Bill Act”) will negatively affect students with disabilities, who rely on Medicaid services and supports to ensure they are able to go to school and have their access needs met.

### **Plain Language**

**Senate HELP Committee** – On Wednesday, September 17, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee had a hearing to talk about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A hearing is a meeting where a group of lawmakers in Congress invite someone to share information on a specific topic. The hearing was called “Restoring Trust Through Radical Transparency: Reviewing Recent Events at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Implications for Children’s Health.” The CDC is a department in the government that works on keeping Americans healthy and safe from diseases. Dr. Susan Monarez was the Director of the CDC until Secretary Kennedy fired her after less than a month on the job.

Dr. Monarez said that Secretary Kennedy fired her because he wanted her to approve some new guidance on vaccines before she had seen the guidance. Vaccines are shots doctors give people to keep people from getting sick. Dr. Monarez said that Secretary Kennedy wanted her to approve new guidance about who can get vaccines and when children should get certain vaccines. She said there was no science to prove that Secretary Kennedy’s new guidance would be good advice. Another person who worked at CDC, Dr. Deb Houry, was also at this hearing.

Dr. Monarez and Dr. Houry both said that Secretary Kennedy was making a lot of bad changes at CDC. They were worried that some diseases might come back because Secretary Kennedy is making it harder to get some vaccines. There are diseases like polio and measles that no one really gets

anymore. This is because scientists invented vaccines, people took the vaccines, and now no one gets those diseases anymore. However, there have been some people who got measles in the U.S. this past year. This is making a lot of people worried.

**Senate HELP K-12 Education** – On Thursday, September 18, the Senate HELP Committee had a hearing called “The State of K-12 Education.” The hearing was mostly about how to help students get better grades on tests, make sure students are coming to school every day, and get students excited about learning.

Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) talked about how the Trump Administration canceled a lot of funding for special education. She said it was a big problem in Wisconsin, because they need more special education teachers. She said that the Administration took money away from the program that trains special education teachers because it works on “diversity, equity, and inclusion” or “DEI.” Diversity means different kinds of people who look different from each other or have different life experiences. Equity means everyone having access to the same resources, places, and information. Inclusion means including people in society. The Trump Administration has done a lot of things to stop programs that work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) talked about how the big cuts to Medicaid in H.R.1 (the reconciliation bill or “One Big, Beautiful Bill Act”) will be bad for students with disabilities. Many students rely on Medicaid services and supports every day. These services and supports are really important to make sure students have the things they need—like a wheelchair or a direct care worker—so they can succeed in school. You can watch this [video](#) from Disability Policy for All with Liz from the summer that explains what the Medicaid cuts were in H.R.1.

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## **Department of Health and Human Services**

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is currently holding a two-day meeting to review vaccine recommendations and consider changing the childhood vaccine schedule, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) set as guidance for children nationwide. They met on September 18 to discuss the vaccine guidance for COVID-19, hepatitis B, and the measles vaccines. These are not

mandates, but guidance and recommendations from the federal government.

ACIP [voted](#) to change the vaccine recommendation for the MMRV vaccine—this stands for measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella (also known as chickenpox). Previously, it was [recommended](#) for children to get their first dose of the vaccine at age 12-15 months and the second dose at age 4-6 years. The panel voted on Thursday to advise that the MMRV vaccine not be administered to children younger than four years old. They also voted to advise that children receive the vaccines separately—one for MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) and one for varicella, or chickenpox. The panel [voted](#) on September 19 to change the current coverage for the MMRV vaccine under the federal government's [Vaccines for Children program](#). This means that the program will no longer cover this vaccine for the younger children who will not be included in the recommendation, so parents who are not able to pay for a vaccine will be turned away. The next step is for Acting CDC Director Jim O'Neill to decide whether to approve the changes.

### **Key Takeaways**

Many doctors have weighed in on the MMRV vaccine change and have said that there is no scientific evidence to delay administration of this vaccine. Changing the childhood vaccine schedule could lead to fewer children getting vaccinated against preventable diseases and poses a huge risk for certain immunocompromised and disabled children who could be more susceptible to contracting these diseases. *Read more analysis about the ACIP meeting [here](#).*

ACIP is also expected to change recommendations for the hepatitis B vaccine, which is typically administered at birth. After this week's CDC hearing, Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) said that "if the ACIP later this week rescinds its recommendation for universal hepatitis B vaccination of newborns, the American people should not trust the recommendation," according to reporting from Politico and [ABC News](#).

ACIP is also expected to change recommendations for the COVID vaccine. States including California, Oregon, Washington, Massachusetts, and New York are starting to move away from relying on the federal government's guidance on vaccines. *Read more in this [past issue](#) of Disability Policy News.*



In June, Secretary Kennedy fired all 17 members of the ACIP at CDC and replaced it with 8 new advisers. [Public health advocates](#) were concerned by the new advisers, because many have expressed vaccine skepticism in the past, spread vaccine misinformation, or disagreed with the public health measures taken to keep people safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Plain Language**

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is a group of vaccine experts who help the government make choices about vaccines. Vaccines are shots doctors give people to keep people from getting sick. They are having a meeting September 18 and 19 to decide if they will make changes to the federal government's vaccine advice. They decided to change the vaccine advice about vaccines that stop people from getting a few diseases, including measles and chickenpox. They said children should wait until they are 4 years old to get the vaccine for these diseases. This could be dangerous for children who might get the diseases before they turn 4 years old.

There is a program called the Vaccines for Children program. This program helps people pay for vaccines that the government recommends children get. ACIP decided that the Vaccines for Children program will not help people pay for these measles and chickenpox vaccines for children under 4 years old. This will make it harder for some people to get vaccines.

There are a lot of doctors and scientists who say that there isn't a good reason to change the federal government's vaccine advice. They say that the changes ACIP is making right now could be bad.

In June, Secretary Kennedy fired a group of people who vote on what advice they will give to HHS about vaccines. Then, he hired new people. Many advocates were concerned with this new group of people. The people in this new group have all done or said things that spread incorrect information about vaccines or show they don't agree with the things the government did to keep people safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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### **The SUPPORT Act**

On Thursday, September 18, the Senate [passed](#) the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorizations Act ([H.R.2483](#)). This



legislation reauthorizes treatment and recovery programs for people with substance use disorder, as well as prevention services. The bill includes support for individuals and families impacted by [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder](#) (FASD). The bill was introduced in the House by Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Brett Guthrie (R-KY) and in the Senate by HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA). Since it has already passed in the House, the next step is for the President to sign the bill into law.

### **Key Takeaways**

This bill includes language that advocates have pushed for, including language from the [FASD Respect Act \(S.139\)](#), which was introduced earlier this year by Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). It reauthorizes programs to educate the public—including school-age children and pregnant people—about FASD, support and conduct research on FASD, develop appropriate medical diagnostic methods for identifying FASD, and [more](#).

AUCD's FASD special interest group (SIG) meets to discuss issues and share information about FASD. *Learn more [here](#).*

### **Plain Language**

On Thursday, September 18, the Senate passed a bill called the SUPPORT Act. This bill will help people who have a disease called addiction, which is when someone is sick because they use certain drugs or alcohol. The bill will help people and families affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). FASD is a disability that children get when their mother drinks alcohol while she is pregnant with them. The SUPPORT Act will help people do more research on FASD, teach people about FASD, and make sure doctors know what FASD is and how to help people who have it. Now that the House and the Senate passed the bill, it will go to the President.

AUCD has a group that meets to talk about issues and share information about FASD. You can learn more about it [here](#).

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### **New Legislation**

- The Keep Billionaires Out of Social Security Act ([S.2763](#))
  - Introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

- Would reverse the cuts the Trump Administration has made to the Social Security Administration and increase funding for customer service, modernizing technology, and reducing backlog
- You can read Senator Sander's press release [here](#).
- The Head Start for America's Children Act ([S.2819](#))
  - Introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)
  - Would expand Head Start to serve more young children and modify program hours to align with more families' schedules
  - You can read Senator Sander's press release [here](#).

## Plain Language

There are a few new bills in the U.S. Congress.

- The **Keep Billionaires Out of Social Security Act** would give more money to the Social Security Administration (SSA). Billionaires are people who make a lot of money. The SSA is in charge of making sure older adults and people with disabilities get their benefits, like Social Security Disability Insurance. The Trump Administration fired a lot of people at SSA and changed a lot about how SSA works. This bill would reverse all those changes.
- The **Head Start for America's Children Act** would help the Head Start program support more young children. Head Start is a government program that helps children learn and grow before they start kindergarten.

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## AUCD Story Collection

AUCD is collecting stories from the Network on a variety of topics to amplify the effects of this Administration on real people and our programs. If you have a story, we want to hear it.

We are interested in stories about:

- Medicaid and its impact on people's lives
- The impact of dismantling ACL
- The important work of UCEDDs, LENDs, IDDRCs, PNS's, DD Councils, P&As

- The impact of zeroing out UCEDDs, LENDs, IDDRCs, PNS's, DD Councils, P&As
- Impact of grants that are being cut
- Stories responding to RFK Jr.'s claims about autism or the autism registry

You can use [this link](#) to provide information and let us know if you are comfortable sharing your story with Members of Congress and their staff.

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### **AUCD Policy Blog**

AUCD invites Network members to [fill out this form](#) if you're interested in writing for the AUCD policy blog. Right now, we would love to hear from experts in our Network who want to write about education and the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IDEA.

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### **Disability Policy for All with Liz**

Join Liz on Instagram Reels, where she will continue to provide plain language updates on policy, highlighting current issues and hot topics in federal disability policy.

Liz Weintraub is AUCD's Senior Advocacy Specialist and the host of "[Disability Policy for All with Liz](#)." She has extensive experience practicing leadership in self-advocacy and has held many board and advisory positions at state and national organizations, including the Council on Quality & Leadership (CQL) and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council.

Watch Disability Policy for All with Liz videos [here](#).

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### **Words to Know**

#### **Appropriations**

This is money that is set aside by Congress for a particular use. The appropriations process happens once a year. Money is sometimes requested by the President's Administration or by Congress for a specific use.

**Continuing Resolution**

This is an agreement to fund the government for a short amount of time. This agreement usually lasts for less than a year. It is sometimes called a 'CR.'

**Vaccine**

Vaccines are shots that doctors, nurses, and other people who work in health care give people to keep us from getting sick.

**Tax Credit**

A tax credit is an amount of money that people can save when they file their taxes. Usually, they are a reward from the federal government. For example, if the federal government wants more people to get health insurance, they might offer a tax credit to people who get health insurance.

**Addiction**

This is a sickness that some people have. It makes them feel like they need to take certain drugs or drink alcohol to feel okay. It can be very hard to stop taking drugs or drinking alcohol if people are addicted to them.