

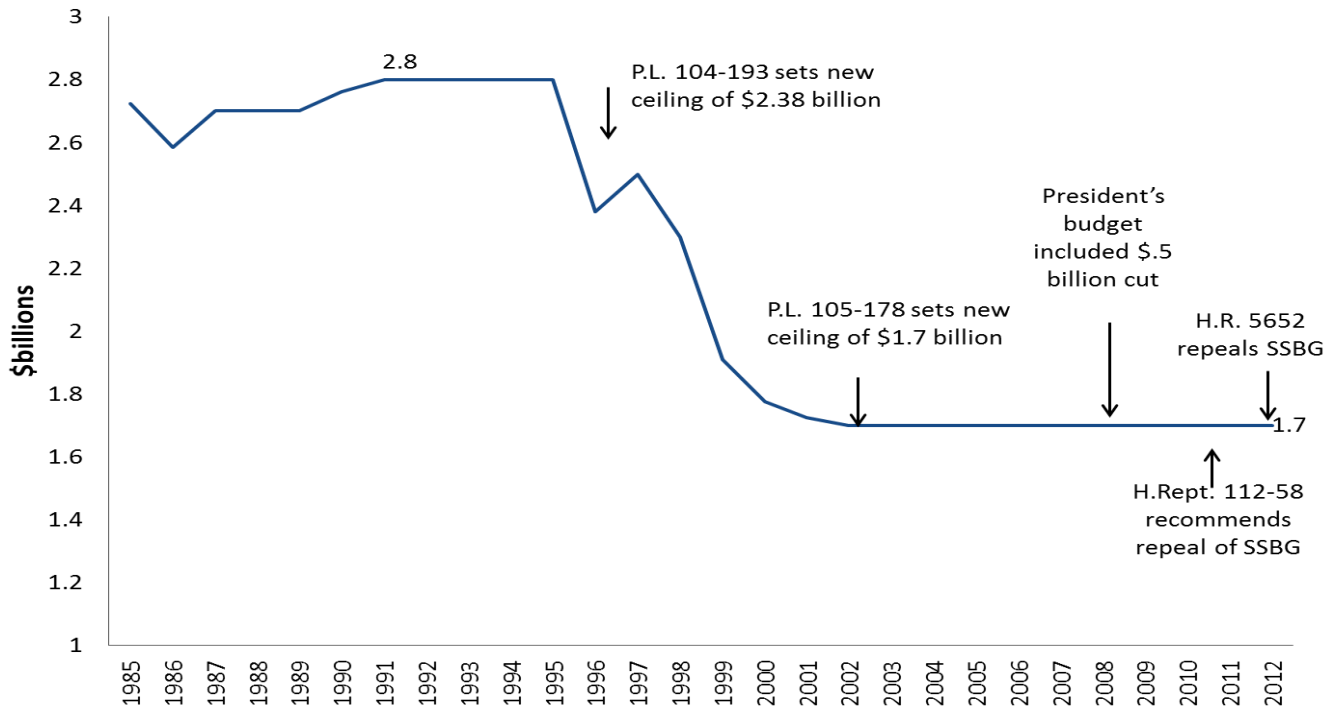
SOCIAL SERVICES BLOCK GRANT (SSBG): *ATTENTION NOW BEFORE IT GOES!*

Recent legislative actions and threats are increasing the likelihood that this significant source of human service funding could be drastically changed or even eliminated. Such an outcome would cut services for human services and harm the populations in need: children, families and vulnerable adults including the elderly and people with disabilities. At this point silence or the status quo will not help.

About the Social Services Block Grant

The Social Services Block Grant (Title XX) is a federal block grant that currently provides \$1.7 billion to all states. States have flexibility to use funds on any of 29 human service programs including services for children, elderly adults, domestic violence victims, and individuals with disabilities. While states have usually transfer \$1 billion a year in TANF funds bringing combined funding to over \$2.8 billion, a detailed analysis of SSBG funds examining just the \$1.7 billion as reported by states demonstrates significant dollars are spent on children in child protection and child welfare (\$500 million), disabled populations (nearly \$300 million), domestic violence victims (\$170 million) the elderly (\$100 million), and other needy adults seeking counseling, case management, treatment and other services. Over time funding has eroded and strong advocacy in support of it has dwindled or gone silent.

Social Services Block Grant Appropriations



In 1981 SSBG was converted into a block grant from an entitlement based on eligibility standards. Funding was stable until the 1996 TANF law; it was cut again in 1999, 2000 and 2001. In 2006 a presidential budget proposed severe cuts of a half billion dollars, in 2012 and 2013 it was reduced by sequestration while other proposals in 2011, 2012 and 2013 would eliminate it completely or take all funding.

Legislative History

SSBG was created in 1956 (in the Social Security Act) to help families on public assistance. In 1981, to restrain costs, it was converted into a flexible state block grant. States were given a deal: it would be block-granted and capped but states could eliminate eligibility requirements and spend funds on any of 29 human services however they chose. Through the eighties to 1996 funding was approximately \$2.8 billion (with some boosts during recessions) until it was to cut temporarily to \$2.3 billion (for six years) as an offset within the new TANF block grant (PL 104-193). States were given the ability to transfer 10 percent of their TANF block grant. In 1998 Congress reversed course by cutting SSBG again and making the cuts permanent as a way to offset the cost of that year's transportation reauthorization (PL 105-178). As a result it was reduced over the next three years to \$1.7 billion. After those cuts there were on-going bipartisan legislative efforts to either protect or even restore SSBG to the 1996 level of \$2.8 billion. Members including Senator Bob Graham (D-FL), Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT), Senator Orin Hatch (R-UT), Congressman David Camp (R-MI), Congressman Sander Levin (D-MI) and Congresswoman Nancy Johnson (R-CT) and many others from both parties joined onto bills as main sponsors or cosponsors to restore SSBG \$2.8 billion. But that has changed.

SSBG's Future is in Doubt

Starting in 2006, budget proposals by the Bush Administration for FY 2007, '08 and FY '09, proposed cuts of \$500 million. They argued "several weaknesses of the block grant, noting that the flexibility of SSBG makes it difficult to measure performance." A recent House Budget Committee report citing earlier criticism argued, "... 29 different services are supported by SSBG—including one called "other"—and many of these services supported by SSBG are also supported by specific programs. But unlike SSBG, these programs contain accountability measures, which help policymakers evaluate their efficacy. State reporting requires only the number of participants..."

Recent House action (H. Con Res 112 and HR 5652, 2012, House Budget Resolution 2014) would eliminate all \$1.7 billion in SSBG funding. Senate Bill (S. 1518) transfers all funding into child welfare for youth and other child welfare services, under the 2013 sequestration and the recent budget agreement (PL 113-76) SSBG is reduced 5.1 percent in 2013 through 2015. In addition annual reports are not being issued on a regular basis.

Proposals To Protect SSBG

Here are a few of the proposals that are being discussed, planned, voted on or considered:

- Eliminate it and use it for deficit reduction, it's a block grant which means the budget savings are felt immediately and not dependent on long term changes
- Re-write definitions, reduce the programs covered and require coordination and require funding meet the standards and outcomes of programs that SSBG supplements
- Transfer funding into another program as some legislation and discussions have suggested
- Require a state match and other changes to allocations including creating a tribal set-aside
- Redistribute funds to states based on past historic use or state choice
- Re-write definitions for evidence-based/informed programs with new categories of programs

Supporters should face the need to re-craft SSBG if it is to survive. The status quo will likely mean that next year it is eliminated altogether as the current House budget resolution proposes or it could be traded off in a future budget deal or as a future offset within programs as happened in 1996 under TANF, 1998 under the transportation act or 2013 as part of a substitute for the sequestration cuts. Look for additional papers here in the near future.