

Legislative Update



March 2019

- 1. President signs FY 2019 omnibus spending bill, ending immediate threat of another government shutdown**
- 2. APHA supports funding for gun violence research and background checks for all gun purchases**
- 3. APHA opposes the administration's Title X "domestic gag rule"**
- 4. Organizations call for increased funding for CDC environmental health programs**

President signs FY 2019 omnibus spending bill, ending immediate threat of another government shutdown

On Feb. 15, President Trump signed the remaining seven FY 2019 spending bills into law. Enactment of the omnibus funding bill effectively ends any further immediate threats of a government shutdown. Prior to signing the bill, the president agreed to end the more than four week government shutdown by signing a three week continuing resolution, which allowed congressional negotiators to finalize the final FY 2019 spending bill. The White House refused to support and the then-Republican controlled House of Representatives failed to pass the initial FY 2019 spending agreement passed by the Senate last year because it failed to provide any funding for construction of a physical wall on the U.S./Mexico border, which the White House and many House Republicans had insisted be included in the bill. APHA urged the [White House](#) and [Congress](#) to end the shutdown several times due to its detrimental impacts on public health programs and nearly 800,000 federal employees. The final FY 2019 spending bill included funding for several agencies with programs that play a critical role in protecting public health, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture and the Indian Health Service. A summary of the final funding bill can be viewed on the [House Appropriations Committee website](#).

The bill also rejected funding for wall construction, but the president later declared a national emergency in an effort to divert other existing funding for his proposal. The emergency declaration is already the subject of several lawsuits in the U.S. courts, and on Feb. 26 the House passed [a resolution](#), by a vote of 245-182,

overturning the president's emergency declaration. The Senate is expected to vote on the resolution in the next several weeks. If the resolution passes the Senate it will head to the president's desk for what will likely be his first veto.

APHA supports funding for gun violence research and background checks for all gun purchases

On Feb. 21, APHA and more than 160 other state and national public health and medical organizations sent letters to [House](#) and [Senate](#) Appropriations Committee leaders urging them to support federal funding for public health research into firearm morbidity and mortality prevention. The letter requests the committee provide \$50 million in such funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in fiscal year 2020. Since 1996, CDC has not conducted any research related to firearms because of the Dickey Amendment, an amendment to the 1996 spending bill, which indicates that CDC cannot advocate for or promote gun control. As a result, CDC has not funded needed research into important issues, including: the best ways to prevent unintended firearm injuries and fatalities among women and children; the most effective methods to prevent firearm-related suicides; the measures that can best prevent the next shooting at a school or public place; and numerous other vital public health questions. An annual commitment of \$50 million to CDC would support 10 to 20 new large, multi-year studies each year and would help rebuild the body of gun violence prevention research that has shrunk in the decades since the Dickey Amendment. This approach can help reduce gun violence in our communities.

On Feb. 25, APHA [sent a letter](#) to all members of the House of Representatives urging them to support of H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019. Current law, which only requires background checks for guns purchased from federally licensed dealers, is inadequate and contains significant gaps that allow easy access to weapons for felons, domestic abusers, the seriously mentally ill and others prohibited from owning firearms. The Bipartisan Background Checks Act would close these senseless loopholes by requiring the same background check for all commercial gun sales, including those at gun shows, on the internet and through classified ads. Gun violence is one of the leading preventable causes of death in the nation. In 2017, more than 39,000 people died as a result of gun violence, and nearly 90,000 suffered nonfatal gun injuries. APHA strongly supports this and other commonsense interventions to reduce the toll of gun violence in our communities. Fortunately, the bill passed the House on a bipartisan vote of [240-190](#). Unfortunately, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has stated that he has no plans to bring the bill up for a vote in the Senate.

Advocates can [send a message to their members of Congress](#) in support of gun violence research funding, universal background checks and commonsense measures to reduce the toll of gun violence in the U.S.

APHA opposes the administration's Title X "domestic gag rule"

On Feb. 22, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a [final rule](#) that will restrict federal funds for any Title X funded clinic that performs abortions, such as Planned Parenthood health centers. Title X grants provide funding to community health centers and family planning clinics to support health care service delivery for more than 4 million Americans, including low-income and uninsured individuals. This new policy, often referred to as a “domestic gag rule,” would cut off Title X funds for health providers and facilities that provide or refer for abortions. However, current policy enforced by the Hyde Amendment already bans federal funding of abortions. APHA [issued a statement](#) condemning the rule, citing the numerous public health benefits of the Title X Family Planning Program, including reducing teen pregnancy, reducing infertility, decreasing cervical cancer rates, and identifying, treating and preventing sexually transmitted infections. In the statement, APHA Executive Director, Georges Benjamin, MD, expressed concern about the effects of limiting access to care and health information and policing health providers ability to provide all health care options for their patients. He noted that, “political ideology has no place in the exam room.”

Organizations call for increased funding for CDC environmental health programs

On Feb. 26, 48 public health, environmental health and other supporting organizations joined APHA in sending a [letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committee leaders](#) urging them to provide at least \$230 million for critical public health programs within CDC’s National Center for Environmental Health. NCEH funding has been relatively flat over the past decade, and some programs like the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention program have finally regained ground after suffering major cuts in funding since 2012. In addition to lead poisoning prevention, NCEH funds programs that address asthma, environmental health tracking, population-based biomonitoring surveillance and a program to help state and local health departments protect their communities from the health threats associated with climate change.

Additional APHA advocacy news

Given the rapid pace of action in Washington, D.C., we wanted to highlight additional issues we have weighed in on recently. Those include:

- [Organization letter](#) in support of the Agriculture Research Integrity Act, which would preserve the independence of food and nutrition research and statistical agencies within USDA (Feb. 22)
- [Organization letter](#) urging members of Congress to support the WIC Act to expand WIC eligibility for at-risk infants, children and new mothers (Feb. 21)
- [Organization letter](#) urging members of Congress to cosponsor the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (Feb. 7)
- [Health organization letter](#) opposing the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act (Feb. 4)

- Organization letter to members of the [Senate](#) and [House](#) in support of the Every Kid Outdoors Act (Feb. 1)