



COMMITTEE *on* APPROPRIATIONS

CHAIRWOMAN BARBARA A. MIKULSKI

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Opening Statement of Chairwoman Barbara A. Mikulski

Chairwoman Mikulski calls for short and long term solution to humanitarian crisis created by surge of unaccompanied minors crossing into the country

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.), Chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee, today spoke at a subcommittee markup on the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending bill. She also spoke on the urgent need to address the issue of unaccompanied children.

“The plight of unaccompanied children is a humanitarian crisis that demands our immediate attention and I commend my colleagues for stepping up to the challenge. I have been working across government agencies – bringing together the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of State – to address this evolving crisis,” Chairwoman Mikulski said.

Beginning in 2012, the number of children fleeing escalating gang and drug violence in Central America, seeking relief in the United States and to reunite with families already living here, began to significantly increase. The number of children has increased so dramatically over the last year that it has created an urgent humanitarian crisis. In May 2014 alone, approximately 9,500 children were apprehended by the DHS and transferred to HHS care, representing a more than 300 percent increase over May 2013.

To address this emerging crisis, the Committee includes \$1.9 billion for the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) program. And, given the uncertainty of estimates for this program, the bill also expands transfer authority so HHS can respond to any sudden or urgent needs in the future. If current trends continue, this authority will likely be exercised in order pay for needed increases in shelter capacity and provide the critical support services for children in HHS care and following their release to a parent or sponsor.

The following are Chairwoman Mikulski’s remarks, as prepared for delivery:

“I want to thank Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Moran for putting together the fiscal year 2015 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS-Education) Appropriations Bill.

“My thoughts and prayers are with Senator Moran and his family today as he deals with the loss of his father. I appreciate Senator Shelby filling in today so we can proceed with the subcommittee markup.

“The Labor-HHS-Education bill is the largest domestic appropriations bill. It is the second largest bill in the Committee’s jurisdiction after the defense bill.

“But as I’ve said before, the Labor-HHS-Education bill is also in a way about defense. The Department of Education is about defending our children and ensuring they get a good education and every chance to succeed. The Department of Labor is about defending our economy and ensuring we support and create jobs. And the

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is about defending our families and making sure we protect the public health.

“There are three great things we are doing in this bill that I’d like to focus on. First, we invest \$30.5 billion in the National Institutes for Health (NIH), \$605 million above the fiscal FY14 level of \$29.9 billion.

“This bill before us today fully replaces devastating NIH sequester cuts and includes \$100 million for the BRAIN Initiative. This is a revolutionary initiative that will help scientists map the brain. We must make it a priority to ensure that NIH has stable and reliable funding to conduct research that will help cure, treat and prevent debilitating and costly conditions such as Alzheimer’s, autism and cancer. By replacing the NIH sequester cuts, this bill gets us back on track and I will continue to fight for increases to NIH in the coming years.

“This bill also builds on the historic investments we made in early childhood education in the FY14 omnibus. It sets aside \$2.46 billion for Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which is an increase of \$100 million from the FY14 level of \$2.36 billion. The program ensures 1.5 million low-income working families can afford child care.

“The bill also invests \$350 million in Pre-School Development Grants, \$100 million above FY14 levels. These grants assist states in developing, enhancing, and expanding high-quality preschool for all 4-year-olds. Furthermore, it sets aside \$8.74 billion for Head Start, an increase of \$145 million above FY14.

“I am very proud that this bill includes our best efforts at finding a short and long term solution to the emerging issue of unaccompanied children crossing our borders, ending up alone and without basic services. Our bill responds to this crisis at our borders by investing \$1.94 billion, an increase of \$1.03 billion above the FY14 level of \$912 million. We also provide transfer authority in case there are additional costs.

“The plight of unaccompanied children is a humanitarian crisis that demands our immediate attention and I commend my colleagues for stepping up to the challenge. I have been working across government agencies – bringing together the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), HHS, and the Department of State – to address this evolving crisis.

“Each of our appropriations bills for these agencies will provide resources and direction so they can respond to the dramatic increase in children who each day flee their increasingly dangerous homelands in Central America that are beset by drug and gang violence.

“The number of kids apprehended by DHS and transferred to HHS has increased dramatically from 6,600 in FY11 to an estimated 60,000-70,000 in FY14. If current trends continue, this number could increase to somewhere between 127,000 and 145,000 in FY15. These are stark numbers and demand a response and a plan. The funds in our various appropriations bills will expand shelter space and ensure basic services for these kids such as nutrition, education, counseling and legal representation.

“I understand there are some proposals in this bill that will not be universally supported across the aisle. That’s the nature of any bill or budget. We all have things we like and things we don’t like. It is my hope that we can work together to come to agreement as best we can and not make any one issue a ‘deal breaker.’

“Our nation is better off when we work together and govern together. I think we all recognize that sequesters and continuing resolutions are no way to effectively govern. It is my sincere and strong desire to pass a Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill this year. I believe that goal is shared by Senators Harkin and Moran. So let’s roll up our sleeves this week and do it.”

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