Last week, just in time for the New Year (and to avert another government shutdown), Congress passed a final $1.1 trillion spending bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 that will fund all federal discretionary programs through next fall. President Obama signed the bill into law Friday, Dec. 18.

The bill includes all federal agencies’ discretionary spending: big ticket items like the military, veterans’ health care, education and law enforcement support, medical research, and virtually all of the budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), including all its major homeless programs.

Here at the Alliance, we have been advocating since February for Congress to approve the funding levels outlined in the President’s budget proposal for HUD’s homeless programs. And there was some cause for hope: an October budget deal that raised the previous caps on discretionary spending meant there was a little breathing room in the HUD budget, but not much.

Now, with the passage of this omnibus spending bill, we finally know what the approved funding levels are. And as usual, it’s a mixed bag. The omnibus will help us move forward, but it’s well short of putting the money on the table that communities need to end homelessness, let alone address the nation’s growing affordable housing crisis.

Here’s a quick look:

* The only actual increases in capacity for programs that help low income Americans pay rent were in targeted homeless programs: about $65 million in Homeless Assistance (on top of  a $50 million increase needed to pay for higher costs for existing grants) and $60 million for new housing vouchers under the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program. Other than that, however, HUD housing subsidies like Section 8 and public housing received only enough funding to maintain existing capacity. (The Home and CDBGF programs received new capital subsidies, but those won’t necessarily help low income or homeless people.)
* The rest of HUD spending in the bill is about maintaining the status quo, which is of course much better than the spending cuts we feared. The two largest accounts at HUD, Tenant-Based Rental Assistance and Project-Based Rental Assistance, received an increase totaling well over $1 billion just to maintain their existing capacity.
* One very bright spot in the bill presents a huge opportunity for Continuums of Care (CoCs) to explore new approaches for serving homeless youth: $33 million of the new Homeless Assistance funding is set aside “to demonstrate how a comprehensive approach to serving homeless youth, age 24 and under, in up to 10 communities, including at least four rural communities, can dramatically reduce youth homelessness.”
* Also included were $5 million for new technical assistance and $4.5 million for data analysis, both meant for serving homeless youth.
* The large capital funding programs, CDBG and HOME, received just over $4 billion combined, approximately what they received last year ($50 million more for HOME, $6 million less for CDBG). These programs almost entirely fund new projects, but because they usually pay for capital and not operating expenses, they generally do not produce housing affordable to people below the poverty line unless they are matched with rent subsidies.

Overall, the funding levels included in this bill aren’t nearly enough, given the numbers of people in this country who are in need and at risk. Low-income Americans face rent burdens that are higher than ever, and more than half a million people remain on the streets and in shelters every night. This year, communities like Los Angeles and Portland with rapidly swelling homeless populations have gone so far as to declare states of emergency.

For years, practitioners and advocates in the homeless assistance field have worked to develop a level of know-how that has made ending homelessness an achievable goal. We know what we need to do; we just need the resources to do it. And yet, the resources we need still aren’t on the table.

We are so grateful to all the stakeholders who worked this year in our advocacy efforts as well as to all the communities who made the most of homeless funding in FY 2015. Congress has made sure that funding depends on results and to a large extent the field has embraced that.

With the recent Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), the Continuum of Care is the most competitive program at HUD, and it’s no coincidence that it’s also the program at HUD that received the largest amount of money for new programs.

[Advocacy](http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/c/advocacy), [Budget](http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/c/budget), [HUD](http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/c/hud)