

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET PROCESS BASICS

The Constitution gives Congress the power to spend money from the U.S. Treasury. Congress has a set of complex rules for that process. Here's a basic explanation of the process and how it affects funding for the Coverdell Act.

Authorization versus Appropriation

(Opening a bank account vs Having a bank account with money in it)

Authorization

The federal government cannot spend money on any program or agency without first getting authorization from Congress. An authorization bill clears the way for money to be spent, but it doesn't actually fund a program or agency. Authorization bills establish or continue a program or agency, set policies concerning it, and recommend spending levels, but these levels are not binding.

The Paul Coverdell National Forensic Sciences Act of 2000 was an authorization bill. It passed both houses of Congress unanimously and was signed into law in 2000.

However, authorization doesn't ensure that Congress will actually vote to spend any money on a particular item. Money is only allocated through appropriation bills.

Appropriation

The fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30. In February, the President submits his budget request to Congress for the next fiscal year. The budget is then sent by each house of Congress to its own Appropriations Committee.

Each Appropriations Committee has 13 subcommittees. The subcommittees draft the 13 annual appropriations bills that fund the federal government.

The Coverdell Act falls under the jurisdiction of the *Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science* in the Senate, and the *Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related Agencies* in the House of Representatives.

When each subcommittee finishes its work, it votes to send its bill on to the full Appropriations Committee, which then votes on the bill, sometimes adding amendments.

Once the bill passes the Appropriations Committee, it goes to the floor that committee's house (the House of Representatives or the Senate). Amendments may also be added at that time.

After each house of Congress passes the bill, it goes to conference with the other house. Conference is where the two houses decide (reconcile) on a final version of the bill. When the House of Representatives and the Senate agree on final legislation, it goes to the President to be signed into law.

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Current Situation For Coverdell Funding:

The President submitted his budget to the United States Congress this year and provided funding only for DNA in the forensics community. Further, funding that may have been available to the forensic community from Byrne or COP grants has also been zeroed. As a result we need people to **urge their Member of Congress and the Chairman of each committee to FUND COVERDELL at \$25 million this year.**

While we do not have a schedule on timing of bill mark up yet, this bill is typically marked up in June.

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