



MSHA State Grants Funding in Omnibus Bill

Insights

1.16.14

I don't want to count my chickens before they hatch, but this week the mining industry received a late Christmas present in the form of proposed secured funding for FY 2014 state grants program. You may recall my brief mention of MSHA's proposal to de-fund the state grants program and shift the allocated funds to the enforcement budget in my prior posts - "Tri-State Meeting is a Success" and "[It's Not About Safety, It's About Compliance](#)". Essentially, the state grants program provides funding to states (typically government agencies and non-profits) to provide training to miners in that state. From my experience, there is a huge benefit to mine safety based on a focus on and commitment to training, and the state grants program is a big part of that in many states.

The state grants program was established in [Section 503 of the Mine Act](#), which provides that "The Secretary [of Labor], in coordination with the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Secretary of the Interior, is authorized to make grants in accordance with an application approved under this section to any State in which coal or other mining takes place--(1) to assist such State in developing and enforcing effective coal or other mine health and safety laws and regulations consistent with the provisions of section 506 of this Act; (2) to improve State workmen's compensation and occupational disease laws and programs related to coal or other mine employment; and (3) to promote Federal-State coordination and cooperation in improving the health and safety conditions in the coal or other mines."

This past year, MSHA proposed to de-fund the state grants program, which led a few states (including Pennsylvania and North Carolina) to request public hearings regarding MSHA's proposed denial or reduction of funding. Additionally, industry groups across the country wrote letters to Congress, called MSHA officials, and advocated for continued funding of this important program. Apparently, some of these calls, letters, and requests were heard.

This week, Congress released its proposed [Omnibus budget for FY 2014](#), which includes more than \$8.4 million in funding, specifically for the state grants program. In case you don't have time to read the over 1,500 page bill, you can find the relevant portions on pages 873-874. The bill, in its current form, includes an \$8.4 million (minimum guaranteed) carve-out for state grants program from the \$375 million proposed MSHA budget. In the past, MSHA budgets have not included a specific reference to (or guarantee for) state grants funding. If this bill is passed by both chambers of Congress, without amendment to this section, and is signed by the President, the state grants program will have guaranteed funding for FY 2014 (and hopefully beyond).

This is a huge victory for the mining industry and is heartening because improving training programs will undoubtedly save the lives of many miners. Stay tuned as we continue to follow the bill and other hot issues in the world of health and safety.