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## [H.R. 598, Taxpayers Right-To-Know Act](#)

### FLOOR SITUATION

On Monday, January 11, 2016, the House will consider [H.R. 598](#), *the Taxpayers Right-To-Know Act*, under suspension of the rules. H.R. 598 was introduced on January 28, 2015 by Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI) and was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, which ordered the bill reported, as amended, by voice vote, on July 22, 2015.

### SUMMARY

H.R. 598 requires the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide more online information about the cost and performance of federal programs that exceed \$1 million in budget authority, such as program activities, funding amounts, performance information on awards or other financial assistance, and program evaluations. Specifically, the bill requires the publication of the following information for each program in the inventory:

- Aggregated, disaggregated, or consolidated program activities;
- Funding for each program activity for the current and prior two fiscal years;
- Statutes that authorize the program;
- Major regulations specific to the program;
- Information pertaining to grants or other financial assistance distributed by the program;
- Links to any evaluation, assessment, or program performance reviews by the agency, an Inspector General, or GAO released during the prior five years; and,

The bill also requires the publication of the following information for each program in the inventory that exceeds \$10 million in budget authority:

- Funding for each program determined using the pro rata share of the program activities that are aggregated, disaggregated or consolidated, to the maximum extent practicable;
- Information required under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act.

The bill defines program as “an organized set of activities by 1 or more agencies directed toward a common purpose or goal.” The bill also requires OMB to annually publish the total amount of

undisbursed grant funding remaining in grant accounts for which the period of availability to the grantee has expired. The bill directs OMB to prescribe guidance to implement its provisions no later than June 30, 2018, and requires implementation not later than June 30, 2019.

## BACKGROUND

Congress has attempted to “shed light on wasteful and duplicative programs and increase information about federal program performances, but many of these efforts have fallen short of fully reaching the intended outcome of the enacted laws.”<sup>1</sup> The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 for the first time required federal agencies to set goals and measure performance and directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to produce annual reports on agency performance.<sup>2</sup> The law was updated in 2010 to require federal agencies to identify priority goals and measure progress toward meeting those goals, while directing OMB to publish a comprehensive inventory of all federal programs to a central government-wide website.<sup>3</sup>

The intent of these laws has yet to be fully realized because, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), “the approach used by the Office of Management and Budget and agencies has not led to the inventory of all federal programs, along with related budget and performance information”<sup>4</sup> envisioned by the laws. The failure to effectively create a program inventory “is largely due to inconsistent definitions of what constitutes a program.”<sup>5</sup>

H.R. 598 requires distinct parameters and expectations for the program inventory catalog to facilitate the identification of wasteful, duplicative, and unnecessary programs. According to the bill’s sponsor, “the American people deserve to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are spent, and the federal government should be accountable for its spending. It’s no secret the federal government is cluttered with wasteful and duplicative programs, and this bipartisan bill will help identify the outdated programs that should be streamlined or eliminated to save taxpayer money.”<sup>6</sup>

In the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House passed similar legislation, *the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act* (H.R. 1423), by voice vote on February 25, 2014.

## COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) that implementing H.R. 598 would cost \$82 million over the 2016 to 2020 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts. Enacting H.R. 598 could affect direct spending by some agencies because they are authorized to use receipts from the sale of goods, fees, and other collections to cover their operating costs; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures apply. CBO estimates that any net changes in direct spending would not be significant. Enacting the bill would not affect revenues.

## STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information please contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.

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<sup>1</sup> See [House Report 114-298](#) at 4.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id. at 4 and 5.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> See Press Release—“[Walberg, Cooper Introduce Taxpayers Right-To-Know Act](#),” January 28, 2015.