

# **U.S. House approves SSBG funds extension**

**By Amanda Casanova | Posted: Thursday, November 18, 2010 11:00 pm**

The U.S. House of Representatives granted an extension Thursday to social services agencies in Houston and Galveston to spend \$40 million in federal funds and help thousands still recovering from Hurricane Ike.

The money awarded to storm-damaged counties was forfeited when the deadline to spend the social service block grants passed on Sept. 30 and a bill to extend the deadline was blocked in the House at the end of September.

The Senate passed a one-year extension for use of the funds and the House passed the bill by a vote of 366-40.

The bill now will go the president for his signature.

”Being ecstatic doesn’t even describe it” said Joe Compian of Gulf Coast Interfaith and one of the coordinators of local SSBG efforts.

”We have a lot of people in our community committed to helping and this will certainly enable that fine work to continue. It means we can restart.”

Funds were supposed to be spent from September 2009 to September 2010 but paperwork stalled allocation of the money until February 2010.

Programs and jobs cut after the deadline passed now can be reintroduced into four Houston and Galveston lead agencies Compian said.

In September Catholic Charities the agency overseeing housing construction shut down a roof building program after only spending about half of the awarded \$9.9 million.

The University of Texas Medical Branch which handled medical direct health and services eliminated 66 positions and cut prescription help and food distribution programs.

The medical branch lost about \$2.5 million of a \$6.5 million award.

The Gulf Coast Center Mental Health Consortium in charge of mental health services closed counseling offices in Texas City and Galveston.

A homeless support center and 35 jobs also were eliminated when the Consortium forfeited \$2 million of a \$6.8 million award.

Lutheran Social Services which oversaw meeting housing needs stopped providing replacement furniture and appliances to some needy households.

The agency had only spent about \$7.5 million of \$10.7 million when the deadline lapsed.

”Hurricane Ike was a devastating natural disaster that decimated Texas coastal communities and I’m pleased that my colleagues in the House understand what is at stake and did the right thing”  
Congressman Pete Olson R-Sugar Land said.

”This was not new spending but time to spend already allocated funds.”

On Wednesday the Chairman of the Committee on House Ways and Means Sander Levin  
Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee D-Houston and Olson had made appeals for the passage of the  
bill. The bill was written by U.S. Sen. John Cornyn.

”This extension is critical to the recovery of the Houston-Galveston region” Olson said.

”Families are still putting their homes and lives back together.

”The local communities and organizations in charge of this effort will put this funding to good use so  
that families and individuals can fully recover and move forward.”