118th CONGRESS
1st Session

A BILL

To prevent government shutdowns, require zero-based budgeting for all federal agencies, strengthen auditing and transparency, regulate emergency spending, and ensure constituent oversight of appropriations.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
This Act may be cited as the “Constituent First Budget Continuity and Accountability Act.”

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.
(a) Findings.—Congress finds that—
(1) reliance on Continuing Resolutions (CRs) under the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (2 U.S.C. 621 et seq.) has become routine, undermining fiscal discipline;
(2) zero-based budgeting, as recommended by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Government Finance Officers Association, improves accountability by requiring justification of all expenditures;
(3) emergency spending designations have been abused, with more than $12.5 trillion designated as “emergency” since 1991, adding $2.5 trillion in interest costs and undermining fiscal stability [Cato Institute, 2025];
(4) transparency in federal spending data remains incomplete, with GAO reporting persistent gaps in USAspending.gov and subaward reporting [GAO, 2025];
(5) shutdowns harm federal employees, contractors, and citizens, while Members of Congress face no direct penalty.
(b) Purpose.—The purpose of this Act is to—
(1) eliminate shutdowns by providing automatic continuing appropriations;
(2) require zero-based budgeting for all agencies;
(3) regulate and limit emergency spending designations;
(4) strengthen auditing and enforcement mechanisms;
(5) empower citizens with oversight and input.

SEC. 3. AUTOMATIC CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS.
(a) In General.—Chapter 13 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 1311 the following new section:

“§ 1312. Automatic continuing appropriations
(a) If regular appropriations are not enacted by the beginning of a fiscal year, appropriations shall continue automatically at the prior fiscal year’s level, prorated monthly.
(b) No new programs, earmarks, or increases above prior-year levels may be funded under this authority.
(c) Automatic appropriations shall remain in effect until the date of enactment of regular appropriations.”

(b) Conforming Amendment.—Section 1311 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by striking "and" at the end of subsection (a)(5), and by adding at the end: "(7) section 1312 (automatic continuing appropriations)."

SEC. 4. ZERO-BASED BUDGETING REQUIREMENT.

(a) Each agency head shall submit an annual budget request beginning from zero, with full justification for each program and activity, including—

(1) statutory authority (citing relevant provisions of the United States Code);

(2) cost breakdown (personnel, contracts, grants, overhead);

(3) performance metrics and outcomes;

(4) ranking of priority relative to other programs.

(b) No budget request may rely on prior-year funding levels as a baseline.

(c) This requirement shall apply to all submissions under 31 U.S.C. § 1105 (Budget contents and submission to Congress).

SEC. 5. AUDITING AND VERIFICATION.

(a) GAO Audits.—The Comptroller General shall conduct annual audits of at least 25 percent of agencies on a rotating basis, pursuant to 31 U.S.C. § 712.

(b) Publication.—Audit findings shall be published on a public dashboard within 30 days of completion.

(c) Penalties.—Agencies failing to meet audit standards shall incur a 5 percent reduction in administrative funding until compliance is achieved.

SEC. 6. CONSTITUENT OVERSIGHT.

(a) Dashboard.—The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in coordination with GAO, shall maintain a public, searchable dashboard displaying—

(1) each agency's budget justification;

(2) performance metrics;

(3) citizen comment and ranking tools.

(b) Input Period.—Each budget submission shall be subject to a 30-day public comment and ranking period.

(c) Committee Response.—Congressional committees of jurisdiction must publish responses to the top 10 percent of citizen submissions before advancing appropriations.

SEC. 7. PENALTIES FOR CONGRESSIONAL FAILURE.

(a) During any period of automatic continuing appropriations under section 1312 of title 31, United States Code—

(1) Members of Congress shall forfeit pay and allowances (notwithstanding 2 U.S.C. § 4501);

(2) No official travel, other than to return to home state or district, shall be reimbursed;

(3) Committee budgets shall be reduced by 10 percent for each 30 days under CR.

SEC. 8. EMERGENCY SPENDING REFORM.

(a) Emergency Designations.—No appropriation may be designated as "emergency" unless—

(1) it addresses an unforeseen, urgent, and temporary need;

(2) it expires within 180 days unless reauthorized;

(3) it is excluded from baseline projections of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), consistent with the Stop the Baseline Bloat Act (2025).

(b) Transparency.—All emergency appropriations shall be published on the public dashboard within 7 days, with justification and expiration date.

SEC. 9. TECHNOLOGY-NEUTRAL TRANSPARENCY.
(a) All budget justifications and audit data shall be published in both human-readable and machine-readable formats.
(b) The dashboard shall be designed to integrate future technologies, including distributed ledgers and AI-driven analytics, without further statutory amendment.

SEC. 10. RESILIENCE IN CRISIS.
(a) In the event of a declared national emergency, automatic continuing appropriations under section 1312 shall remain in effect, but no emergency spending may be enacted without zero-based justification and public disclosure.
(b) Emergency appropriations shall expire within 180 days unless reauthorized under the procedures of this Act.

SEC. 11. ENFORCEMENT.
(a) Judicial Review.—Any citizen of the United States shall have standing to bring suit in federal court to compel compliance with this Act.
(b) Remedies.—Courts may enjoin noncompliant appropriations, compel publication of required data, and award attorney’s fees to prevailing parties.

SEC. 12. EFFECTIVE DATE.
This Act shall take effect beginning with the first fiscal year after enactment.