

May 4, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

The undersigned organizations are writing at the start of Older Americans Month to urge you to move S.192, the bipartisan Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, to the Senate floor for passage. This bill, originally sponsored by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Patty Murray (D-WA), Richard Burr (R-NC) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT), would ensure the important continuity of Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and services for the next three years.

Like Medicare and Medicaid, the OAA celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this July. For over five decades the OAA—through a nationwide Aging Network including state aging agencies, local area agencies on aging and thousands of local service providers—has been the primary piece of federal legislation supporting social and nutrition services to Americans age 60 and older. The majority of individuals served by OAA-funded programs are at significant risk of hunger, isolation and losing their ability to live independently in their own homes and communities. Programs such as Meals on Wheels, transportation services, caregiver assistance, senior employment and training, and elder rights protection are just some of the vital functions the OAA delivers to more than 11 million seniors and their caregivers annually.

These services and supports help keep seniors healthy and in their homes and communities, delaying and/or preventing the need for more expensive institutional care, such as that paid for through Medicare or Medicaid, thus effectively saving taxpayer, state and federal dollars. Not only are OAA programs extremely cost-effective, but they are long-standing and successful examples of the potential of public-private partnerships. For every \$1 in federal funding provided through the OAA, on average another \$3 is leveraged through other state, local and private sources to support nutritious meals, rides to the doctor, and in-home personal care services, among others.

Currently, 41 million Americans are over the age of 65, representing an 18% increase since 2000. With 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each day, an estimated 80 million Americans will be 65 or older by 2040. Some populations specifically served through the OAA are expanding even more rapidly, such as American Indians/Native Alaskans, whose 65+ population is expected to grow by 116% by 2030. This major influx of older adults will enter an already stressed system, as OAA funding has fallen far short of inflation and population growth for over a decade, rendering current levels insufficient to meet burgeoning needs.

Additionally, the OAA is subject to sequestration, which under current law means unnecessary and harmful cuts every year through 2021. We are concerned that as the bill remains unauthorized, the cumulative impact of these economic and demographic pressures could threaten the very sustainability of OAA programs and the health, dignity, and independence of the older Americans it is intended to serve, as well as create a huge future burden for taxpayers as a whole.

In the 113th Congress and the beginning of the 114th Congress, many Senators and staff worked to produce this solid, bipartisan bill. This January, S.192 passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee unanimously. Not only does the bill enjoy the bipartisan support of 18 cosponsors in the Senate, but it has the additional backing of a wide cross-section of national and community-based organizations. It is time to move forward and get this important law reauthorized.

Thank you in advance for exerting your leadership prerogative to move S.192 immediately to the Senate floor. We believe that passage of this reauthorization in the Senate will compel the House to act as well.

Sincerely,

AARP

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Alliance for Aging Research

Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS)

Alliance to End Hunger

Alzheimer's Foundation of America

American Heart Association

American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA)

American Public Health Association

American Society on Aging

Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (AGHDHBCU)

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN)

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging

B'nai B'rith International

Bread for the World

Caring Across Generations

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

Coalition on Human Needs

Compassion and Choices

Congressional Hunger Center

Easter Seals

Experience Works

Feeding America

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)

House of Levi, Inc.

Jewish Federations of North America

Justice in Aging (formerly the National Senior Citizens Law Center)

LeadingAge

Lutheran Services in America

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Meals on Wheels America

National Alliance for Caregiving

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)

National Association of Counties

National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)

National Association of RSVP Directors

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (NASOP)

National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD)

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

National Council on Aging (NCOA)
National Guardianship Association
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Indian Council on Aging
National Recreation and Park Association
National Respite Coalition
Oral Health America
PHI (Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute)
Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE)
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
The Elizabeth Dole Foundation
The Gerontological Society of America
The Salvation Army National Headquarters
United Cerebral Palsy
Well Spouse Association
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)