



advocacy | action | answers on aging

**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

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October 27, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hal Rogers, Chairman
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Chairman Cochran,
Ranking Member Mikulski, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member
Lowey:

On behalf of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, we are reaching out regarding status of FY 2017 funding bills—particularly as it relates to the funding proposals for Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies appropriations approved by both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees last summer.

As leadership and lawmakers debate next steps on FY 2017 federal funding, **we strongly urge you to approve a full-year, omnibus appropriations bill that includes House-proposed increases and rejects Senate-proposed cuts to Older Americans Act (OAA) and other aging programs.** We believe it is vitally important to pass, in this calendar year, a long-term funding bill for the remainder of FY 2017 and avoid further extending the continuing resolution into the new year. On behalf of n4a's member Area Agencies on Aging and other community-based health and social services providers that depend on reliable, predictable federal funding to efficiently and

effectively serve vulnerable seniors and caregivers in their communities, it is imperative that the 114th Congress fulfill its responsibility to the nation and finalize FY 2017 federal funding this year.

As you are aware, the dramatic growth in the number of older individuals in the U.S. means that investments in cost-effective, efficient community-based support services for seniors are more important than ever.

Specifically, we encourage you to include, at a minimum, the House-proposed \$5 million increase for OAA Title III B Supportive Services, which provide flexible funding to states and local agencies to deliver a wide range of needed supportive services to older Americans. OAA Title III B dollars, for example, support in-home services for frail older adults, senior transportation programs, information and referral/assistance services, case management services, home modification and other housing help, chore services, and emergency/disaster response efforts targeted to older adults. The flexibility of this funding stream gives AAAs greater means to meet the needs of older adults, as identified at the community level, and often is vital to keeping near-low-income seniors from impoverishment and subsequent Medicaid eligibility.

The funding levels that were proposed in the House FY 2017 Labor-HHS bill reflect the first proposed increases for III B funding since the FY 2013 sequester cuts. This unfortunate funding reality for III B has caused tremendous strain on local agencies and providers struggling to keep these services, and the seniors they help, afloat. The proposed increase is an important first step toward rectifying the imbalance between OAA programs that can erode the strength, efficiency and effectiveness of the OAA service-delivery network. We appreciate the House's efforts to begin to rectify this troubling reality, and we encourage lawmakers in both chambers to [learn more about how important III B services are](#) in local communities across the country.

In a final Labor-HHS measure, **we also encourage you to reject the Senate's proposed elimination of funding for the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)**. The \$52 million allocated to SHIP supports unbiased, individual counseling to millions of Medicare beneficiaries in all 54 states and territories. SHIPs not only help seniors navigate the incredibly complicated arena of supplemental Medigap plans, Medicare Advantage (MA) plans and Part D prescription drug plans—and the shifting landscape of Medicare choices (e.g., managed care demonstrations)—but they also help many fixed and low-income seniors save money on their health care costs.

Also, in a final funding package, **we also encourage appropriators to reject the Senate's proposed \$34 million cut to the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)**, which is the only federal workforce development program targeted to serve older Americans.

Furthermore, we hope Congress will also reject the Senate's cut to OAA Title VI Native American aging programs. Older American Indians are the most economically disadvantaged elders in the nation, and OAA Title VI funding levels remain woefully

inadequate to meet the needs of Indian elders, as decades of underinvestment in these programs has created large gaps in service capacity. We were deeply concerned by the Senate's proposal to cut this funding and roll back the modest recent gains for these programs. We look forward to working with lawmakers to ensure that full funding levels for SHIP, SCSEP and Title VI are reflected in a final FY 2017 appropriations bill.

Finally, we appreciate the increases included in the House Labor-HHS bill, which match the President's FY 2017 funding request, for **OAA Title III C nutrition programs**. While all OAA programs remain funded at levels that cannot meet the demand for these services or adequately address increasing costs of delivering services, we appreciate that the home-delivered and congregate meals programs have seen some restoration from eroded funding. Furthermore, we recognize and appreciate the other small (less than 1%), but important, gains that several OAA programs received in the House FY 2017 Labor-HHS funding bill, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that these increases are realized in any final funding bill.

Again, we understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which Congress is operating. However, we hope you will make every effort this year to pass a full-year FY 2017 omnibus bill; to reject relying on continuing resolutions into the new year; and to prevent the erosion of, and reinforce commitment to, innovative, efficient and cost-effective programs that enable older Americans to live at home and in their communities for as long as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Markwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc:

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS

Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee

Members of the House Appropriations Committee