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National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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n4a Board Member from Oregon Testifies Before Senate Committee on Challenges of Serving Rural Seniors, Maintaining their Access to Critical Social Services

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Margaret Davidson, Executive Director of the Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc., based in La Grande, and n4a Board Member representing Region 10, testified during a Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing entitled “Aging in Rural America: Preserving Seniors’ Access to Health Care.”

Ms. Davidson’s testimony focused on her agency’s experience, as both an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and Community Action Program, in administering nutrition and other Older Americans Act programs, dial-a-ride and door-to-door transportation services, and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to rural seniors. Ms. Davidson highlighted the important role AAAs and Title VI aging programs play in rural and frontier areas of the country in serving the basic needs of seniors, many of whom depend upon home-delivered meals volunteers and outreach staff for the only interaction they receive during the week.

“For many seniors, our home-delivered meals drivers are the only people they see all day. In those outlying communities, meals are provided just one day per week. Consequently, many older adults withdraw and become depressed and develop physical and mental health issues. The interaction they receive at senior centers and with outreach staff that visit their home helps to minimize or prevent such conditions,” she said.

Ms. Davidson also discussed the economic stresses many AAAs and Title VI Native American aging programs are now facing, especially in the past six months. She was optimistic about the future, however, noting that, “Although, times are now hard with agencies making the most out of limited funding resources to serve a growing number of clients despite ever increasing costs, the future holds both opportunities and challenges for the Aging Services Network. We are poised nationally and at the local level to better serve [older adults] and their families in rural communities.”

In her testimony, Ms. Davidson offered the following policy recommendations: Provide emergency funding for Older Americans Act programs in the next supplemental appropriations bill; expand on funding available under LIHEAP in anticipation of record high home heating bills this winter; enhance home and community-based services for older adults who live in rural areas and around the country; increase mobility options for rural seniors in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill (SAFETEA-LU); and ensure that there is an adequate supply of safe, affordable, accessible, and energy-efficient housing for older adults.

To access Ms. Davidson’s full testimony and a web cast of the hearing, please visit the Senate Special Committee on Aging web site at: http://aging.senate.gov/hearing_detail.cfm?id=301584&.

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National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is the umbrella organization for the 650 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and more than 240 Title VI Native American aging programs in the U.S. The fundamental mission of the AAAs and Title VI programs is to provide services which make it possible for older individuals to remain in their homes, thereby preserving their independence and dignity. These agencies coordinate and support a wide range of home and community-based services, including information and referral, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, employment services, senior centers, adult day care and a long-term care ombudsman program. For more information, go to www.n4a.org.