March 17, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you consider the fiscal year (FY) 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you adequately fund several programs critical to supporting family caregivers and their loved ones. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

As members of the bicameral, Assisting Caregivers Today (ACT) Caucus, we believe that family caregivers are the backbone of services and supports in this country. They are often the first line of assistance for most people and help make it possible for older adults and individuals with disabilities to live independently in their homes and communities rather than in more costly institutional settings. In 2013, about 40 million family caregivers provided unpaid care valued at about $470 billion to adults who needed help with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, meal preparation, and transportation. About 3.7 million family caregivers provide care to a child under age 18 who has a medical, behavioral or other condition or disability. Family caregivers provide at least some level of support for an estimated 90 percent of people with physical or cognitive disabilities.

The aging population has caused an increasing demand for services and supports to help people live independently in their homes and communities. Shrinking family sizes combined with the increased complexity of care necessary mean that greater support is needed in order to lessen the strain in the daily lives of caregiving families. With the health care and long-term services and supports (LTSS) systems increasingly relying on unpaid family caregivers to provide complex medical tasks, care coordination, and direct care assistance, additional resources at the community level are necessary in order to meet these expectations.

As you consider your priorities for FY 2017, we would like to bring your attention to several federal programs that are designed to better assist family caregivers.

The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCS, Title IIIIE of the Older Americans Act) was established in 2000 and provides grants to states in order to help family caregivers care for their loved ones in their own homes for as long as possible. The program provides individual
counseling and caregiver training, assistance to caregivers in gaining access to available services, respite care, and certain supplemental services. We request that you consider funding the National Family Caregiver Support Program at a level that takes into consideration the challenges faced by family caregivers who are being asked to take on an even larger role in caring for their loved ones.

While caregiving is a labor of love, studies have shown that a caregiver’s mental and physical health can also be impacted by the amount of care they are providing. Respite has been shown to improve caregiver well-being, promote family stability, and avoid or delay more costly out-of-home placements. However, 85 percent of family caregivers caring for an adult have not used respite.

Through the Administration for Community Living, the Lifespan Respite Care Program provides competitive grants to states to support statewide Lifespan Respite systems that maximize public and private resources to improve and expand quality respite options for family caregivers. Lifespan Respite is the only federal program to address respite accessibility and affordability issues for families regardless of age or disability status.

Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia have received Lifespan Respite grants. Grant activities include promoting collaboration among state agencies, including veterans caregiver services, to help streamline services; helping underserved families better afford respite through participant-directed voucher programs or mini-grants to community agencies; building partnerships with employers and the faith community; recruiting and training respite workers and volunteers; and raising awareness about respite through public education campaigns. Given the potential that respite has to positively impact both caregiver health and the health of the caregiver’s loved one, we request that you provide sufficient funding for the Lifespan Respite Care Program.

We look forward to working with you to further support family caregivers in the FY 2017 Appropriations bill. Many individuals have been, are, or will be a family caregiver or are likely to need the help of one to live independently in our homes and communities. We thank you for your attention to our request.

Sincerely,

Kelly A. Ayotte
U.S. Senator

Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator

Amy Klobuchar
U.S. Senator