Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 funding for programs within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, we respectfully request your special attention to several programs critical to supporting family caregivers.

Family caregivers are the backbone of services and supports in this country – they are the first line of assistance for most people and they help make it possible for older adults and people with disabilities to live independently in their homes and communities instead of 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, more than total Medicaid spending that year. About 3.7 million family caregivers provide care to a child under age 18 because of 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. By supporting family caregivers, we can help people stay at home where they want to be, helping to delay or prevent more costly institutional care and unnecessary hospitalizations, and saving taxpayer dollars.

Funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP, Title IIIE of the Older Americans Act) has remained essentially the same or even declined over the past decade. The rising demand for services and supports to help people live independently in their homes and communities due to the aging of the population, coupled with shrinking family size and increased complexity of care provided, means support is needed now, more than ever, to lessen the strain in the daily lives of caregiving families. As the health care and long-term services and supports (LTSS) systems increasingly rely on unpaid family caregivers to perform complex medical tasks, care coordination, direct care assistance to family members and for family caregivers to become members of the "care team" with providers, we need to provide vital resources at the community level to be able to meet these expectations. We ask that you provide appropriate funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program for services including
counseling, information, and training. Additionally, we ask you to include support for the Native American Caregiver Support Services program which offers similar services for Native American family caregivers.

Respite has been shown to improve caregiver well-being, promote family stability, and avoid or delay more costly out-of-home placements, yet 85% 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 grants. Grant activities include promoting collaboration among state agencies, including veterans caregiver services, to help streamline services; helping unserved families pay for 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. We urge you to provide sufficient funding for the Lifespan Respite Care Program.

Family caregivers often need information about helping their loved one live at home or in the community. Aging and Disability Resource Centers provide streamlined access for consumers and family caregivers seeking one-on-one person-centered counseling and information and referral assistance about public and private options for LTSS. We request that you include financial support for Aging and Disability Resource Centers.

We look forward to working with you to further support family caregivers in the FY 2017 budget. 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.

Sincerely,

Diane Black
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
Member of Congress