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**National Association of  
Area Agencies on Aging**

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August 14, 2020

The Honorable Tina Smith  
United States Senate  
720 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Trone  
United States House of Representatives  
1213 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Smith and Representative Trone:

On behalf of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and is an advocacy voice for the more than 250 OAA Title VI Native American aging programs, we write today in strong support of the recently introduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation to address the increase in social isolation and loneliness among older adults due to COVID-19.

We are pleased to see that the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020, S. 4477/H.R. 8026, deploys expanded authorities included in March's unanimously approved Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020, P.L. 116-131, to address the rapidly growing issue of community disconnect within an aging nation. We applaud your proposal to provide emergency supplemental funding to programs that strengthen social connectedness and address the negative health effects of social isolation among older adults who are particularly at risk of adverse consequences of social isolation and loneliness as the pandemic persists and stay-at-home recommendations continue. We strongly urge lawmakers to include this important funding in the next round of COVID-19 relief legislation.

The Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020 will enable Area Agencies on Aging and other aging services providers to implement programmatic and technological solutions to address the very real threat of isolation among older Americans. Among AAAs surveyed by n4a in mid-May, 60 percent were already seeing, among their clients, the negative health effects of social isolation. While all AAAs are actively working to address this issue, much more needs to be done given the staggering size of the problem.

The health risks of inaction are great: one study found a prolonged lack of social connection was equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. That's why loneliness and social isolation are also a significant financial burden to our health care system, costing taxpayers an estimated \$7 billion in Medicare expenditures each year. Pandemic-related prolonged isolation will undoubtedly balloon these health consequences and costs.

Inherently, all OAA programs and services work to mitigate social isolation to varying degrees, but the pandemic has diminished or totally eliminated the efficacy of many of the Aging Network's successful traditional solutions (e.g., congregate dining, adult day, in-person health and wellness classes). While n4a members and their community partners have pivoted to provide alternative programs and services to meet clients' needs in the safest ways possible, this specific investment in infrastructure and innovation to expand the most effective service delivery methods in a newly virtual world is essential.

n4a appreciates your recognition and prioritization of solutions to help address the urgent issue of social isolation and loneliness among older Americans and the provisions in the bill that would provide:

- \$80 million for OAA Title III B Supportive Services for older adults, with a focus on activities to prevent and mitigate the negative health effects of social isolation, including the purchase of technology.
- \$18 million to enhance outreach to older adults and provide technical assistance to help Area Agencies on Aging, service providers and others to reduce the negative health effects of social isolation and loneliness among older adults.
- \$6 million to develop targeted and innovative outreach to minority aging populations to prevent and mitigate the negative health effects of social isolation on those populations.

We urge congressional leaders and lawmakers to incorporate these important provisions of the Strengthening Social Connections Act of 2020 in the next coronavirus relief legislation, and we look forward to working with you on these and other vital policies to support older Americans throughout this crisis and beyond. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or n4a's Senior Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Autumn Campbell, at 202.872.0888.

Sincerely,



Amy E. Gotwals  
Chief, Public Policy and External Affairs

cc:

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer  
Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy  
Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives