Older Americans Act Bill Heads to Senate HELP Committee Vote on Wednesday
Urge Your Senators to Express Their Support!

October 24, 2013

n4a is requesting your urgent action in support of the Older Americans Act. Next Wednesday, October 30, the Senate HELP Committee will take up a bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act. The bill (S.1562), a bipartisan compromise measure that makes very modest changes to the Act, has n4a’s support as we believe it represents a reasonable approach to moving a bill through the Senate in the current political climate, and continues the critical support for the OAA programs and services that you develop, coordinate and deliver every day that serve millions of older Americans.

The legislation was introduced in late September by Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA), Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who all hold leadership positions on the HELP Committee. While only HELP Committee members can vote in Wednesday’s markup, it will help raise the visibility of OAA and the importance of reauthorization if other Senators communicate their support to their counterparts on the Committee—and this is where you come in!

Given the fragile nature of the bipartisan deal and the long, thorough process that led up to the compromise, n4a is also encouraging the HELP Committee members to approve the bill as is, with no additional amendments. We are concerned that additional changes to the bill during markup—no matter how well-intentioned or of merit the proposals may be—will derail the carefully balanced support for the overall measure.

Specifically, n4a expects there to be multiple amendments offered to alter the Act’s funding formula provisions. Since any significant change to the funding formulas would affect our members differently, n4a has a long history of abstaining from this particular policy conversation. This time around, we have retained our neutral position and will continue to do so. We feel it is incumbent upon us to note, however, that if there are changes to the funding formula made at this stage in the process, the likelihood of the bill progressing smoothly to the Senate floor drops precipitously. The hope of Hill champions and advocates alike was to get a clean vote in committee so that the bill could be voted upon by the full Senate later this fall under rules reserved for non-controversial legislation. If the measure passes the
Committee on Wednesday with any polarizing amendments attached, it may prove the death knell for OAA reauthorization in this Congress. If your agency can urge your Senator to express support for the bill as is and without amendment, please do so.

**Requested Action:**

**Step 1)** Please call or email your Senator(s) before Tuesday, October 29 to show your support for S. 1562 and ask for theirs.

As mentioned above, if your Senator(s) are not on the HELP Committee, you are asking them to urge their colleagues who are on the panel to support S. 1562. If you have one Senator on the Committee (which means you should have already received an n4a specialized email), you can certainly ask the other, non-Committee Senator to weigh in with his/her office too!

**Step 2)** Go beyond your call on behalf of your agency/program: enlist others in your community (Advisory Board Members, partners, vendors, clients, etc.) who understand the value of the Older Americans Act to take action as well.

**Key Messages:**

Here is a sample script for your calls or emails, but please be sure to personalize it. For additional resources, view n4a’s OAA reauthorization toolkit which includes additional talking points.

“On behalf of [insert your agency name here or simply say “older adults and caregivers in MY STATE’], I urge the Senator to show his/her support for S. 1562, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2013, before it comes to a vote in the HELP Committee on October 30. The Older Americans Act is critically important to seniors here at home, as it creates and funds the vital home and community-based services that help older Americans to live with maximum health, independence and dignity. We are so pleased the bill has bipartisan support and ask the Senator to press his/her colleagues on the Committee to vote in favor of reauthorization.”

**Tips:**
—If you know who the DC seniors/health staff person is for your Senator, speak to or leave your message with him/her next week.
—If you can get the word out to your local networks and drive lots of calls, customize the above message to your state for folks and have them just leave messages with the front desk person or the answering system.
—If you have more time while speaking to the Senator’s staff or leaving a message, please add a few details about the value of these programs and/or provide examples of the types of programs you fund under OAA (e.g., in-home supportive services, transportation, etc.).

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert, contact n4a’s Senior Director, Public Policy and Advocacy Amy Gotwals at agotwals@n4a.org or n4a’s Manager, Public Policy Neal Karkhanis at nkarkhanis@n4a.org.