



Advocacy**ALERT** A MEMBER BENEFIT

Advocate for FY 2017 OAA Funding Reach out to your Senators and Representatives in April!

March 31, 2016

The appropriations season is kicking off early and in earnest in Washington, DC. This week, n4a sent its annual appropriations request [letter](#) to key decision makers in Congress and played a leadership role in a briefing for House and Senate staff. We've also begun requesting meetings with key Hill offices individually to make the case for investments in Older Americans Act (OAA) and other vital discretionary programs that help seniors.

But we need your help! The [Bipartisan Budget Agreement](#) that was signed into law last fall established effectively flat overall funding levels for FY 2016 and FY 2017. That means that lawmakers will be making very tough decisions about how to award any very limited increases available for discretionary programs—including OAA and other aging programs.

Effective grassroots advocacy is essential to ensure that lawmakers understand the value of OAA programs and the critical role they play in keeping older adults safe, healthy and independent in their homes and communities. While more than 100 n4a members will do their part at the [n4a Aging Policy Briefing & Capitol Hill Day](#) in April to advocate for funding increases, **we need all 622 AAAs, 256 Title VI Native American program and all their local allies to raise their voices in support of Older Americans Act funding!**

State of Appropriations

President's Budget: The President's budget, which adhered to the overall funding level agreed to in the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2015, was released in early February and contains some important recommendations for modest increases for several OAA programs, including OAA III B Supportive Services. (n4a members can read more [here](#).)

Congressional Budgets: In Congress, traditionally, a formal budget resolution is prepared by Budget Committees in each chamber in March. A congressional budget resolution sets the total level of spending authority and revenues, with specific allocations to each major budget category. This non-binding, symbolic plan outlining the chambers' policy priorities is more ambiguous this year because Congress already has its top-line FY 2017 spending number from the Bipartisan Budget Agreement of 2015 (BBA). Theoretically, if a Congressional budget resolution is adopted by April 15, it then guides the appropriations committees, as well as tax and finance panels, for the rest of the year.

This year, the House has been working on a budget resolution, but fiscal conservatives in that chamber have both dismissed the President's budget recommendations and are also pressing House leadership to ignore the overall FY 2017 spending levels passed in the 2015 BBA. This means the House budget process is up in the air as leaders weigh whether to recommend significant cuts to mandatory and discretionary programs or to abide by current law. In the Senate, action on a budget resolution has been postponed for now. The Senate will begin crafting spending bills according to the top-line funding amount for FY 2017 established in the Bipartisan Budget Act. However, Senate leadership has not ruled out consideration of a House budget proposal later this year if one is forthcoming.

While both chambers still publicly state their intent to pass budget resolutions for FY 17, last fall's BBA largely negates the necessity of setting overall spending limits. If another resolution is passed by both chambers, budget leaders will have the authority to send "reconciliation instructions" to the committees with jurisdiction over taxes and mandatory programs, which means that Congress could repeat last year's attempts to make major changes to those programs and revenue streams—including repealing the Affordable Care Act. Any changes would likely be met with a Presidential veto.

Appropriations Process: Traditionally, in late spring and throughout the summer, the House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees of jurisdiction make the specific programmatic determinations for each discretionary line item (e.g., a specific program such as OAA Title III B). This takes several months to move through committee, and larger or more contentious bills can take all summer or fall before being passed. Like all other legislation, the House and Senate must agree on appropriations bills.

Despite the murky forecast at this point about how the House and Senate will proceed with their budget resolutions, appropriators in both the House and Senate are preparing their spending bills for consideration. So, advocates must focus on that process currently underway. The President's recommendations can be used effectively by advocates as we begin our FY 17 appropriations campaign and continue to push for important, overdue increases for OAA programs.

There has been a lot of support for increasing funding for OAA and other aging programs in Congress this month. OAA champions in the House and Senate recruited their colleagues to join letters of support for increasing funding. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and the 30 colleagues who joined him asked for a [12 percent increase](#) for all OAA programs. Representatives Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Patrick Murphy (D-FL) and 47 other Members [urged](#) their appropriations peers to follow the President's recommended increases for OAA III B Supportive Services. n4a was thrilled to see that this first-time effort received the support of so many Members. There were also letters supporting increases for OAA III C Nutrition [programs](#), Elder Justice and Long-Term Care Ombudsman [programs](#), and the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional Assisting Caregivers Today (ACT) Caucus sent letters in the [House](#) and [Senate](#) supporting an increase for the National Family Caregiver Support and the Lifespan Respite programs.

We thank Senator Sanders, Representatives Bonamici and Murphy, and all ACT Caucus co-chairs, along with the Members who signed these letters, for their bold leadership on the importance of increasing funding for the OAA's vital programs and services that help older adults safely remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. **If your Senator or Representative signed these letters, please be sure to acknowledge their leadership with a thank-you note or email!**

Why We Need Your Advocacy

Years of stagnant funding, budget cuts and sequestration have taken their toll on the local aging programs developed and operated by AAAs and Title VI programs. AAA/Title VI leaders tell us they are increasingly concerned about the ability of seniors in their communities to remain living independently without costly institutional care—as a direct result of the federal cuts of the past five years.

Even though there has been partial restoration of sequestration cuts over the past three fiscal years for some OAA programs, the **threat of sequestration is not gone**, and some critical OAA programs—such as Title III B and the Ombudsman Programs—have seen no restoration from sequestration. As it stands now, while the overall size of the federal funding pie should not shrink in FY 17, funding is essentially level. With increasing costs and demand for services, the capacity of local agencies and service providers is shrinking. Competition among discretionary programs is at an all-time high, and in order to be successful in this environment, aging advocates will need to step up our efforts to make the case for increasing OAA funding.

n4a is asking Congress to restore all OAA programs—but particularly Title III B Supportive Services—to at least the pre-sequestration levels of FY 2010. We are also asking for increases for Title VI Native American Aging Programs, National Family Caregiver Support Program and Title VII Long-Term Care Ombudsman. But n4a's funding request letter was one of thousands sent to the Appropriations Committee's leaders, asking for funding for specific programs, and n4a meetings with House and Senate offices will be one of hundreds staff members take. (A full list of n4a's spending priorities will be released in April when we release our *2016 Policy Priorities*.)

To ensure that OAA programs get the attention they deserve, we need Members of Congress to share a similar message with their colleagues on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. This is where you come in!

Take Action Now:

Contact your Representatives and Senators this month and beyond to advocate for funding for OAA programs and services. Use n4a's [March 30 letter](#) to appropriators as a template, but be sure to adjust it to fit your agency. Especially take the time to localize what this funding means for the older adults and people with disabilities in your state and community. Also use [n4a's FY 2017 appropriations campaign tools](#) to help. Stay tuned to this campaign page, as we will be adding resources in the days and weeks ahead!

STEP 1: Reach out to your Senators and Representatives. Attend any public events/town halls they are hosting this month and raise these issues and/or email or fax their local and DC offices. You can send a formal letter from your agency and/or drive citizen calls; just weigh in! (U.S. Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121. Email: www.house.gov and www.senate.gov)

STEP 2: Ask other advocates to do the same! Urge your vendors/providers, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to urge their Members of Congress to increase funding for OAA as well. Please do all you can to amplify the message and engage others who understand the value of OAA in their community!

STEP 3: Invite Members to Older Americans Month events you are hosting in May. Both chambers will recess and be back in their states and districts at some point in May: the House both May 2-9 and the week of May 30; and the Senate May 2-6 and the week of May 30. So get on their local calendars now and engage them in your May events and volunteer opportunities! This is a great opportunity to educate your elected officials about key programs your agency operates and the critical services you provide to their constituents.

Stay tuned for more updates from n4a, and meanwhile...

Come to DC! n4a's Aging Policy Briefing will be held on Capitol Hill, April 25-26, and we need your participation.



n4a just announced some [exciting speakers](#) and a [Capitol Hill Reception](#) on Monday night, April 25, in *Celebration of the Older Americans Act*. [Register Now!!](#)

If you have questions or concerns about this *Advocacy Alert* or n4a's policy positions, please contact Autumn Campbell at acampbell@n4a.org and Amy Gotwals at agotwals@n4a.org.