



House OAA Reauthorization Bill Released *Bill Builds on S. 192, Vote Scheduled for Monday*

March 18, 2016

We promised it was coming! After six months of dogged negotiations between House majority and minority leaders on the House Education and Workforce Committee, an agreement has been reached on the House's version of the Senate-passed S. 192 OAA reauthorization bill.

With this bipartisan compromise finally in hand, the bill will move quickly to the House floor to be considered "under suspension of the rules," which is a method reserved for non-controversial legislation. If all goes as planned, S. 192 (as amended) could be approved on Monday!

Bill Summary. Bill Text.

NUTSHELL: Except for the item detailed below, the House bill maintains just about everything else in the Senate bill, so most of the items discussed in the bill summary (LINK) are items long-ago vetted and endorsed by n4a and other advocates. The only significant change not mentioned below are modest changes to the Title V Senior Community Services Employment Program, which do not appear to be cumbersome or controversial.

DETAILS: Here is what is new—

As n4a has explained over the course of the past year, current House Republican rules require specific authorization levels that start at current appropriations levels. In the past, authorization levels were seen as aspirational; in OAA, most of the programs do not have specific authorization levels but instead say "such sums as may be necessary" [to fund the program]. So this is new territory for n4a and all aging advocates, to move from open-ended or optimistic authorization levels to ones grounded in current reality. Obviously, as advocates we dislike this new reality, but we also fully understand that this is the only way authorizing legislation is now passed in the House.

In the bill, the authorization levels are assumed to be based on the current (FY 2016) appropriations levels, then rise over the three-year authorization period (FY 2017–FY 2019) by a very-heavily-negotiated percentage. It is this percentage growth that the Republican and Democratic staff have been negotiating since September, so their recent agreement is a major breakthrough.

Overall in the bill, authorization levels increase 6.777 percent over three years, with the following annual growth factors: FY 2017 = 2.49 percent, FY 2018 = 2.091 percent, FY 2019 = 2.048 percent.

There is, however, one major exception: the bill level funds AoA's Program Administration funding for all 3 years. The "savings" from this decision were then applied to boost the authorization level growth of the Title III programs that are subject to the hold harmless provision. Subtitles III B, C and D all would receive slightly higher growth each year than the overall average, reaching a cumulative growth of 7 percent over the three-year period. House staff indicated this was done as a nod to the challenges experienced by the Aging Network during the 2013 sequester, including the deeper cuts some states received due to the hold harmless provision. *[Please note: authorization levels are NOT directly related to the funding formula. The House bill maintains the Senate's approach to adjusting the hold harmless mechanism, which n4a members can read more about [here](#).]*

While these authorization growth levels are, when compared to recent funding erosion and ever-growing need, very modest, we must remember two things:

1) This is arguably the best deal we can get in this political and budget environment; and
2) These are not legal ceilings or budget caps. Appropriators frequently go above authorization levels and so acceptance of these authorization levels would not impede or determine n4a's current or future appropriations requests, priorities or advocacy campaigns, nor Congress's ability to increase funding above, even well above, the authorization levels in law.

We know that's confusing—why put in these levels if you aren't going to follow them? But that's how it's done these days in the House. If we want to pass OAA reauthorization under this Congress (and likely the next one as well), these are the rules of the road and the trade-off for getting a bill done.

Action Steps:

We are currently surveying our Board of Directors to determine if we will endorse the House bill. We invite n4a members to also weigh in and [let us know what you think](#).

If you are comfortable with the issues raised above and want to support the bill's passage, here are your simple action steps!

→ Contact all Representatives serving in your area and let them know about the House OAA bill coming to the floor next week.

- ✓ **STEP 1:** Call the DC office and ask for the staff member who handles Older Americans Act issues. You can reach them through the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121.
- ✓ **STEP 2:** Tell them about the House bill expected to come up on the floor on Monday or shortly thereafter.
- ✓ **STEP 3:** Ask them to vote in favor of the measure and consider making a supportive statement on the House floor about the value of OAA programs in their congressional district. (Hopefully, if they chose to do this, you become their expert in gathering information and anecdotes!)

→ Ask other advocates to do the same! Urge your vendors/providers, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to make calls to their Representatives, as well. Please do

all you can to amplify the message and engage others who understand the value of OAA in their communities.

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.