Advocate for FY 2016 Older Americans Act Funding

Reach out to your Senators and Representatives in April!

April 16, 2015

The appropriations season has begun in earnest in Washington, DC. Last week, n4a sent its annual appropriations request letter to key decision-makers in Congress and played a leadership role in two briefings for their staff. We’ve also begun meeting with key Hill offices individually to make the case for investments in Older Americans Act and other vital discretionary programs that help seniors.

But we need your help! Effective grassroots advocacy is absolutely essential to ensuring these programs are protected from the harsh realities of life under sequestration and budget caps. While more than 125 n4a members will do their part at next Tuesday’s n4a Capitol Hill Day, we need all 635 AAAs, 256 Title VI Native American program and all their allies to raise their voices in support of Older Americans Act funding!

State of Appropriations

President’s Budget: The President’s budget was released in early February and contains some exciting recommendations for increases in several OAA programs, including III B Supportive Services and Title VI Native American grants. (n4a members can read more here.)

Congressional Budgets: Both the House and the Senate have passed budget resolutions, but have not yet met their deadline of working out their differences and reaching a common budget by April 15. A congressional budget resolution sets the total level of spending authority and revenues, with specific allocations to each major budget category. Such resolutions are a non-binding plan that guides the appropriations committees, as well as tax and finance panels, for the rest of the year. If 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 could mean major changes to those programs and revenue streams.

Appropriations Process: In late spring and through 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 E). 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. Achieving agreement further lengthens the process. Although appropriations bills are supposed to be finalized by October 1, this deadline is usually missed and a continuing resolution (CR) is relied upon to bridge the funding gap.

In March, OAA champions in the House and Senate recruited their colleagues to join their letters of support for increasing funding. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and the 32 colleagues who joined him asked for a 12 percent increase for all OAA programs. Representatives Patrick Murphy (D-FL) and Ted Deutch (D-FL) and 23 others urged their appropriations peers to follow the President’s recommended increases for OAA III B Supportive Services and III C Nutrition programs.

We thank Senator Sanders, Representatives Murphy and Deutch and their 55 colleagues 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**

Several years of 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 three years.

**Sequestration is not gone.** In FY 2014 and FY 2015, there were partial offsets of the overall total sequester, but most critical OAA programs saw no relief (only the nutrition programs saw any restoration). The pie is not larger this year—overall, it’s smaller, in fact, so competition among discretionary programs is at an all-time high. In order to be successful in this environment, aging advocates will need to step up our efforts in making the case for increasing OAA funding.

n4a is asking Congress to restore all OAA programs—but particularly Title III B Supportive Services, Title VI Native American Aging Programs, National Family Caregiver Support Programs and Title VII Long-Term Care Ombudsman—to at least pre-sequestration levels of FY 2010. 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 office will be one of hundreds staff members take. (For the full list of all of n4a’s spending priorities, see our [2015 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 April 10 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 2016 appropriations campaign tools, including talking points and meeting tips, to help!

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 colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers, providers and clients to make calls and write emails to their legislators, as well.

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 4-11 and 22-29 and the Senate May 25-29. 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. You can remind them, as well, of the upcoming 50th Anniversary of OAA!

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert, please contact n4a’s Public Policy and Advocacy team, Amy Gotwals and Autumn Campbell at 202.872.0888 or agotwals@n4a.org, acampbell@n4a.org.