Advocate for FY 2015 Older Americans Act Funding

Reach out to your Representatives and Senators
During April Recess and at the n4a Capitol Hill Day!

April 22, 2014

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 we’ve begun meeting with Hill offices 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 and the timing is right. Both the House and Senate are in recess this week, and many of you are preparing for meetings with your Congressional delegations in DC next week as part of n4a’s Aging Policy Briefing and Capitol Hill Day.

State of Appropriations

Since the House and Senate agreed to top-line FY 2015 budgets at the end of last year (something that would normally happen this spring), lawmakers are focused on completing the 12 appropriations bills to fund the government. The goal, according to both House and Senate Committee heads leading these efforts, is to finish these bills under “regular order”—in other words, actually following the appropriations process and completing work on time without resorting to continuing resolutions.

Also, while the Senate chose to adhere to the budget agreement passed in December thus negating the need for a new budget resolution, earlier this month the House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan introduced, and the House passed, an alternative FY 2015 budget resolution. The House budget, largely a political document establishing Republican priorities in an important election year, proposed major cuts to non-defense discretionary programs in an effort to eliminate the federal deficit by 2024. n4a released a members-only Legislative Update outlining key components of Ryan’s plan. Overall, the proposal would gut social services far beyond sequestration levels and dramatically restructure Medicare and Medicaid.
Despite this alternative budget resolution, House and Senate appropriators are working from the same top-line numbers for FY 2015. This situation is unique in the current political climate, and means that Appropriations Committee leaders in both chambers are working rapidly to release and mark-up legislation that will establish federal agency and program funding levels for FY 2015. The ambitious collective goal is to move these bills through Congress prior to the start of the fiscal year on October 1. This goal is possible, but whether lawmakers can achieve it remains to be seen. Many Congressional experts expect to see at least one continuing resolution (CR) to temporarily fund the government if agreement is not reached before the deadline.

Earlier this month, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) led the Senate charge for increasing OAA funding in FY 2015, with a sign-on letter to Senate Appropriations Committee leaders that requested at least a 12 percent increase and was signed by 26 other Senators. We thank Senator Sanders and his 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.

Signers of the Sanders OAA Letter: (All Democrats) Whitehouse (RI), Leahy (VT), Rockefeller (WV), Blumenthal (CT), Stabenow (MI), Schumer (NY), Shaheen (NH), Durbin (IL), Manchin (WV), Hirono (HI), Gillibrand (NY), Johnson (SD), Schatz (HI), Baldwin (WI), Casey (PA), Reed (RI), Boxer (CA), Brown (OH), Nelson (FL), Warren (MA), Franken (MN), Wyden (OR), Levin (MI), Booker (NJ), Merkley (OR), Menendez (NJ)

n4a Letter to Congress re: FY 2015 Appropriations:
http://www.n4a.org/files/n4a_OAA_Appropriations_Request_Ltr_4.16.2014.pdf

Advocacy Needed

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. According to a 2013 n4a survey of AAAs in nine states on the impacts of sequestration, nearly 85 percent of respondents stated that they will not be able to provide sufficient aging services if federal cuts, including sequestration, continued beyond FY 2013. Virtually all AAA leaders polled were concerned or very concerned about the ability of seniors in their communities to remain living independently without costly institutional care.

Sequestration is not gone. In FY 2014, there was partial offset of the overall total sequester, but most critical OAA programs saw no relief (most but not all of the OAA’s meals funding lost to the sequester was reinstated in FY 2014). n4a is asking lawmakers to restore all OAA programs—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 2012.

The bottom line is, that FY 2015 and years ahead will continue to be tremendously challenging budget years and all aging advocates will need to step up our efforts if we are to be successful in making the case for preserving or even increasing OAA funding.

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. 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!

**Action Requested:**

→ **Contact your Representatives and Senators over the April recess (through April 25)**
and beyond to advocate for funding for OAA programs and services. Use n4a’s [April 16 letter to appropriators](https://www.n4a.org) as a template, but be sure to adjust 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 2015 appropriations campaign tools](https://www.n4a.org) to help!

**STEP 1: Reach out to your Senators and Representatives.** Attend any public events/town
halls they are hosting during the April recess and raise these issues and/or email their local
and DC offices. (U.S. Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121. Email: [www.house.gov](https://www.house.gov) and
[www.senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov))

**STEP 2: Ask other advocates to do the same!** Urge colleagues, advisory board members,
volunteers and clients to make calls and write emails to their legislators, as well.

**STEP 3: Schedule meetings with your House and Senate members** when you are in DC
for the [n4a Annual Policy Briefing and Capitol Hill Day](https://www.n4a.org) next week, and make sure to let n4a
know which offices you are meeting with ([acampbell@n4a.org](mailto:acampbell@n4a.org) or fill out a form once you’re
here!).

**STEP 4: Invite Members to Older Americans Month events you are hosting in May.** 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.

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](mailto:agotwals@n4a.org),
[acampbell@n4a.org](mailto:acampbell@n4a.org).