Getting to a 2014 Older Americans Act Reauthorization

What Will it Take? You!

June 18, 2014

The number of legislative working days in the 113th Congress is quickly dwindling and the Older Americans Act remains unauthorized. n4a and other national organizations are urging Senators to move this bill now! The current compromise, The Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2013 (S. 1562), represents a bipartisan, modest, reasonable approach to reauthorizing these programs. The bill also reinforces the critical importance of OAA programs and services developed, coordinated and delivered every day by Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI programs across the country.

Watch Now: Special video message from n4a's policy chief about why we are asking for your action on OAA now!

Why is the Bill Stalled?

In October 2013, S. 1562 passed unanimously out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. Conversations around the funding formula, however, derailed the bill’s swift movement toward the Senate floor. Instead, HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) convened a working group to study the issue and develop a compromise to the concerns raised by Senators in very high-growth states. This internal working group reached an impasse this spring and temporarily suspended work on a compromise. As advocates, we now need to turn up the heat to ensure that the Senate bill advances this year!

For background on issues related to the funding formula, please see n4a’s recent legislative webinar as well as a helpful OAA Title III funding formula fact sheet developed by the Leadership Coalition of Aging Organizations (of which n4a is a member).

Please note: n4a does not weigh in with Congress on the details of formula conversations such as those taking place in the Senate. We had hoped that the Senate working group would have found an appropriate way to deal with the formula concerns by now, thus freeing up the bill to advance. With the process stalled, however, we now fear that without a major grassroots show of support for reauthorization in general and pressure to move forward, nothing more will get done on OAA this year.

Why Senate Action is Needed

House leaders have made it clear that they are not moving a bill forward until the Senate acts, but are open to moving a modest bill if the Senate finds a way out of the formula situation. We believe the best scenario for OAA for the next 4-6 years is to finish a bipartisan reauthorization bill this year. Our reading of the political tea leaves and our conversations with key policy staff on Capitol Hill have
convinced us that our best chance of ensuring that the vital OAA programs and services continue uninterrupted is with a 2014 bipartisan reauthorization. Waiting until 2015 means we start all over again—with a new Congress, new leaders and new policy proposals.

While we didn’t get everything we wanted in S. 1562, n4a worked tirelessly to block policies that would work against the mission of the OAA or reduce the roles of AAAs. In 2015, the political climate is likely to be even less favorable to the policies n4a members tell us they want to see enacted—and we run the very real risk of having the OAA’s authorization levels (the recommendation to appropriators as to how much should be spent; most of the Act’s authorization levels are at present open-ended) locked in to current (dismal!) appropriations levels.

Therefore, **we need you to help put renewed pressure on your Senators** to reauthorize these vital community-based programs and services that help older Americans live with maximum health, independence and dignity. Again, n4a will not be weighing in on any formula amendments. Given that S. 1562 was *unanimously* approved by members of the Senate HELP Committee by voice vote last year, it is time to bring a bill to the full Senate for consideration. Please join n4a to help move OAA forward this year! You can help in several ways.

### Take Action

**Reach out to your REPUBLICAN Senators and ask them to co-sponsor S. 1562:**
Currently, Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Ranking Member on the Senate HELP Committee, is the only Republican co-sponsor on OAA reauthorization. HELP Committee staff have indicated that OAA may move more easily if there were more Republicans listed as co-sponsors. Please reach out to your Republican Senator and ask him or her to co-sponsor this bill.

n4a has drafted a [template](#) for use in this outreach. Key Message: “Please co-sponsor S. 1562 to show your support for a bipartisan reauthorization of the Older Americans Act this year.”

**Tell ALL your Senators (of either party) that you strongly support OAA moving forward in 2014 and ask them to help push it along:** OAA advocates will overcome the current impasse only when constituents and their Senators show support for moving the bill forward. One of the most effective and efficient strategies to show the broad support for this bill is when, facing constituent pressure/interest, Senate offices call the HELP Committee staff to ask about the status of the legislation. This shows the kind of broad support needed to get through the tricky formula conversation. Please ask your Senator to help advance OAA reauthorization this year.

**Engage your grassroots network to advocate for OAA reauthorization:** To get this done, our voices must be loud and numerous! Activate your networks through email, social media and any other advocacy tools to contact Congress and demand OAA reauthorization is achieved this year! Also consider engaging:

- Your advisory board/committee members
- The provider organizations you work with
- The older adults and caregivers you work with
- Other aging advocates in your community

**CALL:** Capitol Switchboard (202-224-3121) can connect you to your Senator’s DC office.

**EMAIL:** Go to each Senator’s website and submit your comments there.
To find their websites, use these online tools:
Sample talking points:

- The Older Americans Act (OAA) funds programs—such as in-home supportive services, congregate and home-delivered meals, transportation, employment services and legal assistance—that help older adults remain in the much-preferred setting of their homes and communities.
- For more than 40 years, AAAs and Title VI Native American aging programs, thanks to a base of federal funding through the OAA, have been the focal point in local communities where older adults and families receive vital information and get connected to available services.
- For many older adults, the OAA’s home and community-based services can help prevent unnecessary hospital stays and readmissions and delay or avoid costly institutional placements, both of which save Medicare and Medicaid costs to taxpayers.
- The Act came up for reauthorization in 2011, and there is a bipartisan bill, S. 1562, in the Senate that passed the HELP Committee but is currently stalled.
- We urge you to support S. 1562 and encourage your HELP Committee colleagues to reach a compromise regarding the funding formula to move OAA forward to be considered by the full Senate.
- Support these cost-effective, successful, community-based aging services that are helping seniors and caregivers every day in your district.

More on engaging your Members can be found in n4a’s OAA resource page and other resources at www.n4a.org/advocacy.

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.