Getting to a 2014 Older Americans Act Reauthorization

Reach out to Your Representatives and Senators during Next Week’s Recess!

June 27, 2014

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate will be in their districts and states from June 30 to July 7. This is the perfect opportunity to reach out to your legislators and remind them how important the Older Americans Act is to seniors in their communities. This will be one of the final district and state working periods this Congress, and it is imperative that lawmakers—especially in the Senate—hear from constituents about reauthorizing the Older Americans Act (OAA) this year!

OAA is currently stalled in the Senate, and the House will not act until the Senate does. But hope is not lost! 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.

In order to get this done we need a groundswell of grassroots and grasstops support for OAA reauthorization, and recess is the perfect opportunity to communicate with your Senators and Representatives in your communities! Read on for a few resources n4a has put together that you that you can use!

Recap: Current State of Play?

Last week, n4a sent an Advocacy Alert and video message about the current status of OAA and why we are asking for your action on OAA now! As it stands, a bipartisan OAA bill (S. 1562) passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee last October. That bill is currently stalled after a working group tasked with developing a compromise to update the current funding formula reached an impasse last spring and temporarily suspended work.

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. As advocates, we now need to turn up the heat to ensure that the Senate bill advances this year!

**Action is needed now** because the House will not move until the Senate does. Also, in a potentially shifting political climate, it is our belief that our best chance to ensure 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.

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 weigh 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**

The July Fourth recess is a great opportunity for you to connect with your Representatives and Senators to show them why OAA reauthorization is critical to seniors in your community! There are several things you can do next week to help move OAA forward.

**Submit an Op-Ed to your local newspaper about OAA reauthorization:** Reauthorizing OAA provides a unique opportunity for bipartisan legislative success in an important election year. n4a has put together a [template op-ed](#) that you can customize with local examples of the importance of OAA-supported programs and services.

**Always invite your Representatives and Senators to see your programs at work:** While it may be a late for lawmakers to schedule visits and meetings for next week’s recess, reach out to offices to plan for August. Lawmakers will be in their districts and states during the entire month of August.

**Reach out to or meet with 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. Congressional 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 AND EMAIL: Call the district and state offices of your Representatives and Senators and submit comments via their websites. District and state office contact information is available on the websites as well. To find their websites, use these online tools:
  - Senate: http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Sample talking points about OAA reauthorization:
- 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.

Sample talking points to tell your Senators about S. 1562:
- 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.