Want Older Americans Act Reauthorized?  
Contact your Representatives and Senators This Summer

July 25, 2013

More than two years ago, n4a released a set of recommendations for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) and advocates from across the aging community pushed Congress to begin the process of updating this vital, foundational law. In fall 2011, the previous authorization period expired, although funding has continued to flow to OAA annually through the appropriations process.

While there has been a lot of work done on OAA reauthorization in the Senate committee of jurisdiction, the counterpart House committee has yet to put this on their front burner. In the Senate, HELP Subcommittee Chair Bernie Sanders (I-VT) has been a vocal and energetic champion for OAA and, with the support of Full HELP Committee Chair Tom Harkin (D-IA) and the ranking members (Senators Lamar Alexander, R-TN and Richard Burr, R-NC), a bipartisan working group has begun to meet to explore changes to the legislation. If those talks go well—and if advocates ratchet up the pressure—the HELP Committee could move toward consideration of a bill in September or October.

Both House and Senate legislators, however, still need you to encourage and educate them on the value of the OAA. There are always other reauthorizations and crises-of-the-week demanding Congress’s attention, so if aging advocates are not engaged the risk is no OAA reauthorization or a reauthorization bill with flawed policy changes.

n4a is working nearly daily with key Congressional offices on OAA legislation and will continue to keep our members updated as this process advances. But your role as community supporters of OAA is just as critical! Please use the upcoming August recess to reach out to your elected officials. Members of Congress leave DC in early August and don’t return until September 9; we need all of them to come back to DC from this break having heard about the value of OAA to their constituents and the need to reauthorize it!

Take Action

STEP 1: Have your agency (or advisory council as necessary) formally reach out to all your Members of Congress: offer education and your opinion on the importance of OAA.

1) If your Representative or Senator is well versed in the OAA and you have a strong relationship, still reach out and let them know you are concerned that the Act has not yet been authorized. This can be a letter or email, but if you have contacts with district or DC staff, make sure
you also reach out to them directly. As always, take the time to localize what this issue means for the older adults and caregivers in your community with data and/or testimonials.

2) If your Member is not yet educated on OAA and the work of your agency, please set aside some time in August to engage with them and their staff. A site visit to an OAA-funded program is a fantastic way to show the importance of this federal law and funding, so reach out to the Member’s scheduler for details on how to submit a formal invitation. Do it now, as calendars fill up fast!

If you can not get a site visit, try to secure an office visit with the Member. Barring that, meet with district staff and ask them to patch in the DC-based staff member for seniors/health issues via conference call. See n4a’s Toolkit for key talking points, a guide to recess activities to engage your Member and other resources: www/n4a.org/advocacy.

3) If your Member is on the Senate HELP Committee or House Education and Workforce Committee, it is all the more important that you develop or strengthen your agency’s relationship with his or her office! Your outreach will help them do their job better. Members who do not understand the value of the OAA or how the work of AAAs/Title VIIs supports seniors will not prioritize this issue, or they could propose changes that undermine the strength of the Aging Network or put seniors at risk. Committee lists.

STEP 2: Share this Advocacy Alert with other local advocates for Older Americans Act programs and services and urge them to take action as well. Grassroots pressure on Members of Congress works, especially when what you are asking is 1) important to older adults in their constituency and 2) not hard to do. Ask the following folks to reach out:

- 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
- Any other people you know are interested in OAA, the work of your agency or social service programs in general

Resources and Tips:

Getting on Message: Check out n4a’s updated OAA Reauthorization Grassroots Toolkit for tips on messaging, recess activities and preparing for meetings with Members of Congress.

Note: While n4a continues to push what can be done to improve the OAA (see our formal recommendations as well as simpler talking points), you don’t have to lead with that or go deep on policy!

The message that Congress needs to hear from a range of people is: OAA is important to me/my family/my community and here is why. Please ensure that this vital law is updated and reauthorized soon!

Finding Your MoC: To call Members of Congress’s DC offices, you can use the U.S. Capitol Switchboard [202-224-3121] if you do not have their direct line. Or to submit emails via each lawmaker’s webpage, look up those webpages via www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert, please contact n4a’s Senior Director, Public Policy and Advocacy Amy Gotwals at agotwals@n4a.org or n4a’s Manager, Public Policy Neal Karkhanis at nkarkhanis@n4a.org.