Speak Out on the Sequester!
Make Clear to Congress How Automatic Cuts Will Hurt Older Adults & Caregivers in Your Community

September 19, 2012

Thanks to everyone who took action over the congressional August recess. Unfortunately, the threat of sequestration of all federal discretionary programs in January continues to loom large. We must continue to educate Congress about the potential effects of the sequester on the critical home and community-based services your agency delivers every day!

Tomorrow, September 20, advocates for all types of non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs—from education to health research to aging services—will be calling and Tweeting their Members of Congress with their sequester concerns.

n4a urges all aging advocates to join in. Let your Members of Congress know how the sequester will affect your community’s federally funded programs (e.g., Older Americans Act programs and services), your agency’s ability to meet the needs of your clients, and the ripple effects on the health and independence of older adults and caregivers.

Action Steps to Take:

STEP 1: Gather Your Data. If you have not already calculated what a 7.8 percent cut would mean for your OAA programs and your clients' lives, review n4a's August 6 Advocacy Alert for tips.

STEP 2: Create Your Phone Talking Points. When leaving a message or speaking with a congressional staff member, let them know who you are, what your agency does, then get right to the point: “The planned January 2013 sequester would be devastating to our community’s aging programs and services. After years of stagnant or reduced funding, our agency has nothing left to squeeze out of the budget, so a sequester would directly hurt the older adults and caregivers we help every day. Here’s how...[insert your data messages]” End by asking them what their plan is for averting this dangerous budgetary gimmick and address the real need for a balanced approach to deficit reduction.
STEP 3: Call your Representatives and Senators in DC! To find full contact information for their DC offices, visit their websites, which you can find at: www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. You can also call the Capitol Switchboard (202.224.3121) and ask them to connect you to your Member’s office.

STEP 4: Translate for Twitter. If you tweet as an individual or agency, translate your talking points for this 140-character format. Be sure to mention your elected officials by name (and Twitter handle). A sample string of Tweets to consider adapting:

- Invest in strong aging & disability HCBS. Support balanced approach to stop #sequestration! #NDDUnited
- Under #sequestration in City, State, cuts to include X home-delivered meals. X rides to the doctor, X hours of in-home help to seniors. #NDDUnited
- Only through balanced approach can we avoid #sequestration, balance the budget & restore nation’s economic stability. #NDDUnited
- [Insert Member Twitter handle]: Please support balance to stop #sequestration! #NDDUnited.
- [Insert Member Twitter handle]: Please work w/your colleagues to find a bipartisan, balanced approach to deficit reduction. Stop #sequestration.

STEP 5: Ask others to do the same! Urge colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to make their own calls or Tweets to Congress.

STEP 6: Learn more about sequestration and other pressing federal issues by registering for n4a’s members-only Federal Policy Update webinar, Thursday, Sept. 20 at 2:00 p.m. ET. Register now: http://n4aagecomm.org

Background:

What Is a Sequester?
To sequester means to set apart or to take something away until a debt has been repaid. In the context of funding federal programs, sequester means imminent, across-the-board cuts to most programs, both defense and nondefense—in addition to the $1 trillion in cuts already sustained through the Budget Control Act’s discretionary caps. Sequestration will truly be across-the-board, with no departmental or agency control on how the sequester impacts individual programs. Cuts of this level will be devastating to the public health and social services infrastructure. For example, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) recently released a report speculating that, under a sequester, 17 million meals for seniors would be lost and 1.5 million fewer low-income people served by the Community Services Block Grant.

Why Is This Sequester Happening?
The Budget Control Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-25) established caps on discretionary spending over 10 years, resulting in $1 trillion in cuts spread across defense and non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs. The law also directed a congressional Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to identify an additional $1.2 trillion in budgetary savings over ten years. The failure of this bi-partisan committee to come to an agreement on a deficit reduction plan last fall triggered an automatic sequester to take effect on January 2, 2013.

If you have questions about this Advocacy Alert, please contact n4a’s Public Policy and Advocacy staff, Amy Gotwals and Neal Karkhanis, at 202.872.0888 or agotwals@n4a.org, nkarkhanis@n4a.org.