April 10, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chair
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor/HHS/Education
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor/HHS/Education
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As your Subcommittees consider the FY 2015 Labor/HHS/Education appropriations in the coming months, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country’s 635 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and 256 Title VI Native American aging programs, urges you to prioritize programs that help older Americans get the support they need to age successfully at home and in their communities. The dramatic growth in the number of older individuals in the U.S. means that support services for seniors are more important than ever. To this end, we urge you to:

- **Restore eroded funding to at least FY 2010 levels for all Older Americans Act (OAA) programs, but in particular the following titles, which have had no relief from sequestration:**
  - Title III B Supportive Services
  - Title VI Grants for Native American Aging Programs
  - Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program
  - Title VII State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

- **Continue development of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs).** We support the President’s budget request of $20 million to continue the national development of ADRCs, which are “no wrong door” networks that help consumers access long-term services and supports.

- **Provide funding of $25 million for the Elder Justice Act,** as proposed in the President’s budget. The funds would support grants, technical assistance and evaluation of Adult Protective Services, and research on elder abuse.
n4a fully understands the economic realities facing governments and families. We support sound federal budget decision-making that values key domestic programs to support our growing aging population, and we believe that this investment is in the best interest of all Americans. **That is why we strongly oppose the arbitrary budget caps and sequestration mechanisms called for in the 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA).** Sequestration and arbitrary caps avoid making actual choices about which federal discretionary programs provide the greatest return on investment, reflect the current and future needs of our country, and leverage other dollars at the local level. The savings recouped from these cuts pales in comparison to the added costs of premature nursing home placement for seniors who find they can no longer stay in their homes and communities because of reduced funding for Older Americans Act and other critical services and supports.

Furthermore, n4a believes it is unnecessary and unfair to isolate critical discretionary programs and vital mandatory support for the purpose of deficit reduction, while not looking for savings from the revenue part of the equation. To date, the balance of deficit reduction has come from programs—and almost solely from discretionary programs. This is not balanced or rational budgeting.

As advocates, we take seriously the responsibility of informing Congress about the needs of older adults and caregivers. Therefore, to support older Americans and their caregivers, n4a endorses the following appropriation levels for fiscal year (FY) 2016.

**Older Americans Act (OAA)**

The OAA is the cornerstone of the nation’s HCBS system, providing older adults with much-needed services that include home care, congregate and home-delivered meals, adult day care, case management, legal services, transportation and caregiver support. These services are in high demand in every community, but have limited federal resources.

For years, OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population of individuals eligible for services. OAA programs and services lost more than $103 million (roughly 5.5 percent) from FY 2012 to FY 2013 (post-sequester) and then only regained half of that from FY 2013 to FY 2014, with those restorations limited to the three nutrition programs. There was no restoration in FY 2015, as all OAA programs were level funded.

n4a supports restoring all OAA programs to **at least pre-sequestration FY 2010 funding levels** and encourages appropriators to give special attention to four OAA programs: **Title III B Supportive Services, Title VI Grants for Native Americans, Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program and Title VII State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.**

**Title III B Supportive Services** provides flexible funding to states and local agencies to deliver a wide range of needed supportive services to older Americans. Title III B dollars, for example, support in-home services for frail older adults, senior transportation programs, information and referral/assistance services, case management services, home modification
and other housing help, chore services, and emergency/disaster response efforts targeted to older adults. The flexibility of this funding stream gives AAAs greater means to meet the needs of older adults, as identified at the community level, and often is vital to keeping near-low-income seniors from impoverishment and subsequent Medicaid eligibility.

n4a also strongly supports the President’s recommendation of a $38 million increase for III B Supportive Services in FY 2016, an 11 percent increase. As one of our very top priorities, we urge Congress to not only restore III B funding to pre-sequester levels, but to provide additional funding to meet the incredible demand, per the President’s request.

**Title VI Grants to Indians (Native American aging programs)** is especially overdue for a funding increase. OAA provides the primary authority for funding services to elders in Indian country. Older American Indians are the most economically disadvantaged elders in the nation. Current Title VI funding levels are woefully inadequate to meet the needs of Indian elders, and there has long been a lack of proper investment in these programs, which further exacerbates their challenges. It would take a significant funding increase to fully address the large gaps in service capacity for these programs and start to remedy the many challenges faced by this population—but as the President’s budget illustrates, it does not require much additional funding to begin this process.

n4a urges the adoption of the Administration’s request of a total boost of $3.67 million for Title VI Parts A and C, an 11.2 percent and 12.7 percent increase, respectively.

The [National Family Caregiver Support Program](http://www.aalals.org/programs-and-services/national-family-caregiver-support-program/national-family-caregiver-support-program/) (NFCSP) was added to the OAA as Title III E in 2000 and funds programs offered at the community level through the Aging Network and its partners. The programs assist family members caring for older loved ones who are ill or who have disabilities. The NFCSP offers a range of supports to family caregivers, including information about services; assistance in gaining access to services; counseling, support groups, and caregiver training; respite care; and supplemental services as funding allows. These services are in high demand in every community.

A modest increase of $5 million (3.4 percent) for the National Family Caregiver Support Program, as proposed by the President, would not restore III E to its FY 2010 level, but would begin the restoration process and should be adopted at a minimum.

The [State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (Title VII)](http://www.aalals.org/programs-and-services/state-long-term-care-ombudsman-state-long-term-care-ombudsman/) advocates for residents of long-term care facilities in order to resolve quality of life and care problems, including abuse, neglect and exploitation. Ombudsman representatives protect residents’ rights and improve the long-term supports and services system by giving voice to the problems of residents of nursing homes, assisted living, and board and care facilities. The network has 8,712 volunteers and 1,180 paid staff certified to resolve complaints. Many local ombudsman programs (working under the state-level Ombudsman) reside at the AAA or otherwise coordinate with the AAA. The demand for ombudsman services is growing.

We ask you to restore Ombudsman funding to at least $21.8 million (FY 2010 level) to ensure these critical and largely volunteer-led efforts to protect residents’ rights continue.
n4a also believes the following appropriation actions for FY 2016 are critical to building and maintaining a comprehensive HCBS system that can meet the needs of the growing older adult population. All of the following programs are administered by the Administration for Community Living, HHS.

**Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)**

We ask that you include at least $16 million in discretionary funding for ADRCs in FY 2016, to fill the $10 million gap created by the expiration of mandatory funding provided for ADRCs under the Affordable Care Act for the past five years. If this gap in funding is not bridged, a decade of improvements and advancements in building this national network will be undermined. We support the President’s request of $20 million to expand development of these “No Wrong Door”–model systems that provide a streamlined point of entry for consumers and caregivers seeking information and assistance about public and private options for long-term services and supports (LTSS). ADRC systems not only streamline access to LTSS, they also use taxpayer dollars more efficiently by diverting older adults and individuals with disabilities from the most costly forms of care including institutionalization and hospitalization.

**Elder Justice Act / Adult Protective Services**

The Elder Justice Act (EJA) of 2010, which is authorized at $777 million, would implement a comprehensive national strategy to address elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. If adequately funded, EJA would enhance training, recruitment and staffing in long-term care facilities and enhance state adult protective service systems, long-term care ombudsman programs and law enforcement practices. n4a supports the President’s request for $25 million in EJA funding (focusing on Adult Protective Services) in FY 2016, to be administered by ACL.

**State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs)**

n4a requests that Congress increase funding for the State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) in FY 2016 to meet the ever-growing need to provide one-on-one assistance and counseling on Medicare to beneficiaries at the community level. Now administered by ACL, the SHIP program received $52.1 million in FY 2015. Two-thirds of local SHIPs are operated through AAAs. SHIPs, which rely heavily on trained volunteers, play a critical role in ensuring that that older adults and people with disabilities make informed decisions about their Medicare coverage—including selecting among supplemental Medigap plans, Medicare Advantage (MA) plans and Part D prescription drug plans—and navigate the shifting landscape of Medicare choices (e.g., managed care demonstrations). With 10,000 boomers becoming eligible for Medicare every day, Congress needs to increase SHIP funding to reflect this increasing volume and complexity.
Prevention and Public Health Fund

n4a supports the Administration’s FY 2016 proposal to allocate at least $8 million in funding from the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) to ACL for the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. Additionally, we support the allocation of at least $5 million to ACL for falls prevention activities.

While we understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, we hope you will make every effort in FY 2016 to prevent the erosion of, and reinforce commitment to, innovative, efficient and cost-effective programs that enable older Americans to live at home and in their communities for as long as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc:
Chairman Thad Cochran, Senate Appropriations Committee
Ranking Minority Member Barbara Mikulski, Senate Appropriations Committee
Chairman Harold Rodgers, House Appropriations Committee
Ranking Minority Member Nita Lowey, House Appropriations Committee
Members of the House and Senate Labor/HHS/Education Subcommittees