



advocacy | action | answers on aging

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**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

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The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chairman
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman
Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

As your Committees finalize the FY 2018 Labor/HHS/Education appropriations in the coming months, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs, urges you to consider the below requests that reflect differences between the House and Senate funding proposals for Older Americans Act (OAA) and other aging programs that help older Americans get the support they need to age successfully at home and in their communities.

While we appreciate that both of your committees spared core Older Americans Act programs from significant cuts and that the full House approved a long-overdue increase for OAA Title III B Supportive Services in the final House omnibus, we are greatly concerned about House-passed elimination of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) and significant cuts to senior workforce development and elder justice programs.

We urge lawmakers to work together to pass an FY 2018 funding proposal for non-defense discretionary programs that rejects current stringent budget caps as well as a longer-term bipartisan budget solution. We also urge you to ensure that the highest possible funding levels for OAA and other critical state and local aging programs are reflected in a final funding plan.

The need to prioritize federal investments in discretionary OAA and other aging programs is starkly clear as we begin to experience an

unprecedented and long-term shift in the composition of our country's age demographics. The country is aging at a faster rate than ever, and as n4a's [March 6 FY 2018 appropriations request letter](#) details, choices about where to direct limited federal resources will determine whether we, as a country, are sufficiently prepared to support older adults and caregivers in their homes and communities where they want to be—or whether we allow current home and community-based services (HCBS) resources to erode, *putting older adults at risk of much more expensive medical and long-term care services paid for by Medicare and Medicaid*.

Therefore, as you reconcile your FY 2018 Labor/HHS funding proposals, we ask that, at a minimum, you preserve funding for all Older Americans Act and other aging programs; and specifically, we urge you to consider adopting the following requests:

- **Maintain the House-passed increase for OAA Title III B Supportive Services Programs with a final funding level of \$364.2 million.**
- **Accept the Senate-proposed levels for SHIP, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP, Title V of the OAA) and Elder Justice programs, which were all subject to cuts or elimination in the House-passed funding bill.**
- **Work to incorporate additional increases for OAA programs to, at a minimum, meet the funding levels included in the unanimously approved 2016 Older Americans Act reauthorization bill.** Additional information about the importance and value of Older Americans Act programs is included in our March 6 letter.

Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III B Supportive Services

The OAA is the cornerstone of the nation's non-Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) system, providing older adults with much-needed supports, including in-home care, congregate and home-delivered meals, adult day care, information and referral assistance, case management, transportation, legal services and caregiver support/respite. These services are in high demand in every community, but have very limited federal resources.

Specifically, **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.

Yet III B remains funded at near FY 2004 levels—there has been virtually no restoration to

III B of the OAA since the FY 2013 sequester cuts or other cuts in recent years, even as other OAA programs have seen modest gains. This oversight causes tremendous strain on local agencies and providers struggling to keep these services, and the seniors they help, afloat. This type of imbalance between programs can erode the strength, efficiency and effectiveness of the OAA service delivery network, compromising the seamless, person-centered approach and putting seniors at risk. Furthermore, with inadequate III B funding, access to other OAA programs and services is jeopardized. For example, without sufficient funds to provide transportation services, funded through OAA Title III B, seniors may be left without rides to congregate meal sites, resulting in poorer nutrition and increased isolation.

For more information about the programs that OAA Title III B funds, and examples of how important it is to individuals, please see n4a's issue brief about Title III B:

http://www.n4a.org/files/OAA%20IIIB%20One-Pager_final.pdf

We appreciate that the final FY 2017 funding bill made a modest, but important, \$2.5 million (<1 percent) increase to III B funding. We were also privileged to work with Representatives Martha McSally (R-AZ) and Elise Stefanik (R-NY) to include an amendment in the recently passed House omnibus appropriations bill that provides a \$14.2 million increase for Title III B programs to meet the level included in last year's bipartisan OAA reauthorization.

Accordingly, n4a requests that a final FY 2018 funding bill maintains the House-passed increase for OAA Title III B Supportive Services and begins to restore the erosion from sequester cuts.

State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs)

n4a requests that lawmakers reject the House proposal to eliminate funding for SHIPs. At a minimum, we ask Congress to incorporate SHIP funding levels approved in the Senate, which flat-fund SHIP programs at FY 2017 levels. SHIP programs are critical to meeting the ever-growing need to provide one-on-one assistance and counseling on Medicare to beneficiaries at the community level. Administered by ACL, SHIPs rely heavily on highly-trained volunteers and play a critical role in ensuring that older adults and people with disabilities make informed decisions about their Medicare coverage and navigate the complicated and shifting landscape of Medicare choices. SHIP counseling assistance can save individual Medicare beneficiaries hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars every year.

In FY 2017, the SHIP program received \$47.1 million, which reflected a \$5 million cut compared to FY 2016. With 10,000 boomers becoming eligible for Medicare every day, n4a urges lawmakers to adequately fund SHIPs to reflect the increasing number of clients and complexity of Medicare, and at a minimum reject further funding erosion for these critical programs. We urge Congress to adopt the Senate's recommendation for FY 2018 of \$47.1 million in the final spending package.

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) and Elder Justice Initiative

We were dismayed that House lawmakers approved significant cuts for both senior workforce development programs under Title V of the Older Americans Act and Elder Justice funding. The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is the only federal job training program focused exclusively on helping older Americans return to the workforce. Each year, more than 60,000 older workers from nearly all U.S. counties develop new skills, add relevant work experiences, and strengthen aging and other local programs through their SCSEP on-the-job training and community service assignments.

Additionally, financial exploitation and elder abuse costs taxpayers and victims over \$35 billion each year. The bipartisan Elder Justice Act (EJA), passed in 2010, was the first legislative accomplishment that would implement a comprehensive national strategy to address elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

We encourage Congress to reject House-proposed cuts to SCSEP and the Elder Justice Initiative and to, at a minimum, adopt the Senate-proposed funding levels of \$400 million for SCSEP and \$10 million for the Elder Justice Initiative to avoid further funding erosion for both of these critical programs.

While we understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, we hope you will make every effort in FY 2018 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:

Senate Labor/HHS Chairman Roy Blunt and Ranking Member Patty Murray
House Labor/HHS Chairman Tom Cole and Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees