



advocacy | action | answers on aging

**National Association of
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April 16, 2018

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 2019 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 prioritize 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.

The 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 are unable to sustain and enhance the current network of home and community-based services (HCBS) and put older adults at risk of much more expensive medical and long-term care services paid for by Medicare and Medicaid.

We face a steep slope of an unprecedented and long-term shift in the composition of our country's age demographics ushered in by the maturing of America's baby boomer generation. In the next four years alone, nearly 15 million people will turn age 65. By 2030, 73 million—or one in five—people in America will be 65 or older.

This historic demographic shift is already evident in many U.S. regions, including rural areas, where ratios of older adults far exceed the current national average and available services are unable to keep pace with the growing need. By 2035, all communities must be prepared to address these demographic realities when, for the first time in the nation's history, the population of adults 60 and over will outnumber youth

under 20. The dramatic growth in the number of older individuals in the U.S. means that we must adequately fund services that keep seniors in their homes and communities where they want to be and where care is much less expensive than through Medicare or Medicaid.

Additionally, we hope that in FY 2019, lawmakers will be committed to a pragmatic annual budget process and avoid delaying finalization of spending bills until many months into the fiscal year. Lurching through a series of short-term measures in the form of continuing resolutions (CRs) to keep the government open does not allow for reasonable planning or program stability at the state and local level.

As you continue the process of considering funding requests for FY 2019, we urge you to:

- **Uphold the FY 2018 and FY 2019 increased spending caps for Non-Defense Discretionary (NDD)** programs secured in the 2018 Bipartisan Budget Agreement and reject any proposals from the Administration or congressional leadership to rescind these critical investments.
- **Protect the important funding increases** for the Older Americans Act (OAA) and other aging programs that were implemented in FY 2018, and, **where possible, champion additional funding increases for OAA programs.** In FY 2018, Congress made tremendous strides at restoring years of funding erosion and cuts by boosting most OAA programs, some significantly. As the population of older adults and caregivers continues to grow rapidly, the trajectory of these investments must continue, and we urge Congress in particular to support increases for:
 - **Title III B Supportive Services**
 - **Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program**
 - **Title VI Grants for Native American Aging Programs**
- At a minimum, **protect funding for the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)** and reject cuts or elimination of important SHIP support for Medicare beneficiaries. Additionally, where possible, build upon the FY 2018 increase for SHIP programs to ensure that funding levels adequately reflect and serve the need for these critical and cost-saving services.

Uphold the Bipartisan Deal on FY 2018 and FY 2019 Non-Defense Discretionary (NDD) Spending

n4a fully understands the economic realities facing governments and families and we support sound federal budget decision-making that values key domestic programs. Furthermore, we believe it is unnecessary and unfair to target NDD programs for cuts to offset defense increases and fiscally reckless to burden critical discretionary programs with the bulk of deficit reduction strategies. Savings recouped from deep cuts to critical discretionary programs that support our growing aging population pale in comparison to the added costs of premature nursing home placement for seniors who can longer stay in their homes and communities because Older Americans Act (OAA) and other aging services are inadequately funded to meet the need.

We encourage lawmakers to prioritize a long-term solution to eliminate the budget caps

instead of engaging in continuing cycles of short-term budget agreements that cause harmful, repeated uncertainty in an already challenging annual budget and appropriations process. Vital discretionary programs cannot withstand additional targeting.

While we support the recent Bipartisan Budget Agreement to alleviate the threat of sequestration for FY 2018 and FY 2019, and encourage Congress to sustain overall budget increases while also reexamining the BCA's budget cap and sequestration mechanism altogether. We urge lawmakers to find a more fair and balanced approach to achieve real and meaningful deficit and debt reduction while maintaining a commitment to important discretionary investments in programs serving older adults and caregivers.

Additionally, we implore lawmakers to reject any current attempts from the Administration to rescinding funding from the already finalized, bipartisan FY 2018 omnibus funding bill. Appropriators especially should strongly rebuff threats from the Administration to usurp the constitutionally protected role of Congress to set federal funding levels for discretionary investments.

Protect and Increase Funding for Older Americans Act (OAA) Programs and 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.

For years, OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population eligible for services. This financial reality has made it increasingly difficult for the Aging Network to even maintain existing services, let alone meet escalating need and keep up with a growing population, which increases by thousands each day.

In FY 2018, on the heels of the Bipartisan Budget Agreement, lawmakers approved long-overdue and much-needed increases for many critical OAA and other aging programs. These additional investments in aging services—such as in-home help, transportation and case management; meals delivered in the home or in community/senior centers; caregiver supports and services for those caring for an older adult; elder abuse prevention; and evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs to prevent falls and manage chronic conditions—will directly help older adults and caregivers across the country. With more Americans living longer, investing in cost-effective locally provided programs to help seniors remain independent and healthy for as long as possible just makes sense!

n4a greatly appreciates Congress recognizing the value in increasing funding for many OAA and other federal aging programs. The FY 2018 investments were a necessary first step toward reversing years of stagnant and eroding federal funding.

At a minimum, we encourage Congress to preserve the increases that were secured in FY

2018. However, as the demand for and cost of providing services increases significantly each year as the population of older adults continues to grow, we ask Congress to continue growing these investments, particularly for Title III B Supportive Services, Title VI Native American Aging Programs and Title III E National Family Caregiver Support 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.

Furthermore, inadequate funding for Title III B supportive services undermines the ability of AAAs to facilitate access to other core OAA programs, such as providing seniors with transportation to congregate meals sites. The critical 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.

The 10 percent increase for III B in the final FY 2018 omnibus is a landmark advancement and we thank Congress for wisely investing in OAA III B and restoring sequestration-era cuts. As the demand for and cost of providing services increases significantly each year as the population of older adults continues to grow, however, we urge Congress to continue the growth in this investment.

We encourage Congress and the Administration to once again prioritize increases for III B in FY 2019 to better meet the increasing demand for these cost-effective home and community-based services that keep older adults out of more expensive nursing homes.

Title VI Grants to Indians (Native American Aging Programs), Parts A (meals, supportive services) and C (caregivers) received small-dollar, but programmatically significant, increases in FY 2018. These investments were very much needed—and appreciated. OAA provides the primary authority for funding services to elders in Indian country and older American Indians are the most economically disadvantaged elders in the nation. But even with the recent increases, Title VI funding levels remain woefully inadequate to meet the needs of Indian elders, as decades of underinvestment in these programs has created large gaps in service capacity. Without continued investment, tribes cannot hope to remedy the many challenges faced by their vulnerable elder population.

We encourage lawmakers to build on their FY 2018 recommendations and increase Title VI appropriations levels given the current and future needs of American Indian elders and the years of insufficient growth in funding to meet escalating need. Fortunately, it does not require much additional funding to begin this process, given the small size of these programs, so we encourage Congress to boost funding for Title VI Part A (nutrition and

supportive services) and Part C (family caregiver support) in FY 2019.

The **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 that are in high demand in every community.

Unpaid family caregivers annually provide over \$470 billion in uncompensated care—an amount that rivals the entire federal Medicaid budget. Steady and sustained increases for modest federal programs that support the more than 30 million caregivers are essential to prevent billions in additional care costs to taxpayers if their loved ones are placed in a more expensive institutional setting.

For FY 2019, we encourage Congress to build upon the \$30 million restoration provided in FY 2018 for the National Family Caregiver Support Program in order to address years of funding cuts and erosion.

Protect Funding for the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)

n4a requests that Congress increase funding for SHIPs in FY 2019 to meet the ever-growing need for one-on-one assistance to and counseling of Medicare beneficiaries. Administered by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), and leveraging the work of highly trained volunteers, SHIPs 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, a \$5 million cut over FY 2016. In FY 2018, Congress wisely restored some of that cut with a final appropriation of \$49.1 million. Unfortunately, the President's FY 2019 budget called for the elimination of this effective program, citing duplication. However, the very nature of the effort, which is to help individuals with complicated situations, cannot be successfully addressed by 1.800.MEDICARE or www.medicare.gov.

With 10,000 boomers becoming eligible for Medicare every day, n4a calls on Congress to increase SHIP funding to at least \$67 million to reflect the increasing number of clients and the growing complexity of Medicare.

Our additional funding recommendations (for Aging and Disability Resource Centers, the Elder Justice Act, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, Chronic Disease Self-Management and Falls Prevention programs, and gap-filling block grants) can be found at www.n4a.org/policypositions (pages 11-12 of the 2018 Policy Priorities).

We hope you will make every effort to, at a minimum, protect the increases for OAA and other aging programs that were provided in FY 2018—and continue to prioritize increases in FY 2019. There is still fiscal ground to gain to ensure that these innovative, efficient and cost-effective programs that enable older Americans to live at home and in their communities for as long as possible are able to adequately address the growing need. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Markwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc:

Chairman Richard Shelby, Senate Appropriations Committee
Ranking Minority Member Patrick Leahy, Senate Appropriations Committee
Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, House Appropriations Committee
Ranking Minority Member Nita Lowey, House Appropriations Committee
Members of the House and Senate Labor/HHS/Education Subcommittees