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**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

1100 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20003
P 202.872.0888
F 202.872.0057
n4a.org

January 31, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chair
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair
The Honorable Bob Casey, Ranking Member
Special Senate Committee on Aging
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chair
The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Alexander and Collins, Ranking Members Murray and Casey, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

On behalf of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and is an advocacy voice for the more than 250 OAA Title VI Native American aging programs, we write today in strong support of the recently introduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation to update and reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA) through 2024.

The Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020, an amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 4334, co-sponsored by Senators Collins and Casey, represents the diligent work of all of your Committee Members and staff to secure broad and bipartisan support to responsibly update a landmark Act that supports millions of older adults and caregivers in communities across the nation.

As you well know, 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.

n4a appreciates your recognition of what is already working in the Act, including its unique delivery structure and intentional emphasis on local flexibility.

We especially commend the bicameral and bipartisan work to include the following provisions in the amendment to H.R. 4334, as they are among the most important provisions in the bill and reflect many of n4a's policy recommendations, which we shared with Congress in March 2019.

- **We very much appreciate the annual increases in the authorized funding levels.** A lack of adequate funding is the number one barrier our members face in meeting the needs of older adults and caregivers, and with the rapidly increasing numbers of older adults in every community, the bill's recommendations to increase core programs by seven percent in year one and six percent in subsequent years is an excellent starting point for appropriators to heed. Additionally, we are pleased that the bill returns to a five-year authorization period, which provides greater stability and allows the Aging Network to focus on achieving the Act's goals, rather than divert time to advocacy to renew a law that works so well.
- Part of any reauthorization is ensuring that the law remains clear in its direction, even as other systems or laws change over time. Section 118 is an excellent example of this, whereby **the bill makes clear that Area Agencies on Aging can engage in emerging opportunities to serve greater numbers of older adults through non-OAA funding streams.** Examples include contracts with health care payers to provide meals or transportation to clients; establishing private-pay programs to enable AAAs to provide services to those who can afford to purchase OAA-like services when OAA resources are limited or unavailable; or similar mechanisms that serve the goals of the Act while operating outside of it. The bill also makes clear the role of the Assistant Secretary on Aging to continue encouraging and training the Aging Network on these matters of business acumen, innovation and changing models of health care and social services.
- **We also commend the Title VI Native American aging program provisions.** By allowing the Administration on Aging to create demonstrations around a broader array of Supportive Services than most Title VI aging programs can currently provide and includes increased funding to do so—the bill will help tribes build capacity and better meet the needs of the elders they serve.
- By including **a robust new research and demonstration authority for the Administration on Aging (AoA) in Title IV**, we appreciate your work to create a research and evaluation center in Sec. 127 focused on promoting and coordinating research and evaluation activities to enhance performance, develop new models and produce data-driven assessments of the value of the OAA programs. While we are disappointed that these activities lack a specific funding authorization, we are pleased that lawmakers acknowledge the importance of these activities and the need to create a dedicated entity focused on them.
- While a smaller measure, **eliminating a 10 percent cap on serving grandparents**

and other older relative caregivers under the Act's Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program is also important to n4a members. Eliminating this arbitrary cap reflects the growing realities of the opioid epidemic and the need for sufficient state and local flexibility to serve these older caregivers who face uniquely challenging caregiving burdens.

- The research base revealing the negative health outcomes from **social isolation and loneliness** continues to grow and increasingly documents the risks to the health and well-being of older adults. n4a appreciates the bill's thoughtful addition of language in multiple places in the Act to recognize the challenge we face, as well as the fact that many core OAA programs already address social isolation and promote social engagement.
- n4a requested a minor change to ensure that Area Agencies on Aging have access to a state's cost-sharing policy or guidance. Section 212 of the bill also accomplishes this.

We will not detail the many other provisions in the bill—most of which we support or take no position on—but will again reiterate our thanks that **this final product reflects our members' concerns and realities**. Congress was diligent in soliciting and considering the recommendations of a broad array of constituencies and organizations during this reauthorization process.

Thank you for your leadership in crafting an OAA update that ensures that the Act's innovative, efficient programs enabling older Americans to live at home and in their communities for as long as possible continues to be a lifeline in communities across the country.

We urge the Senate and House to act swiftly to approve the Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020, H.R. 4334, and send it to President Trump for his signature. The stability that a finalized and current OAA reauthorization provides is critical to ensuring that the millions of older adults and caregivers served by the OAA can continue to live with dignity and independence in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or n4a's policy staff at 202.872.0888.

Sincerely,



Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc:

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives