



advocacy | action | answers on aging

October 11, 2018

**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20036

P 202.872.0888
F 202.872.0057

www.n4a.org

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We are writing in response to your recent decision to reallocate \$266 million in FY 2018–appropriated Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) funds. In order to secure additional funds for the Administration’s response to separated immigrant children, your plan transfers roughly \$5 million from already underfunded state and local programs supporting older adults and their caregivers. While not responding to the merits of the targeted family reunification activities, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)—which represents the country’s 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and serves as a voice in Washington for more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs—urges you to reconsider this reallocation.

n4a members coordinate and deliver federal Older Americans Act (OAA) and other aging programs to help millions of older Americans and their caregivers get the support they need to age successfully at home and in their communities. 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.

While we understand that the Administration is grappling with numerous priorities, we believe it is illogical to target these critical programs for cuts of any amount. 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 over ten thousand each day.

We are also concerned about the precedent that this process establishes. We urge HHS to pursue established and appropriate channels through Congress to secure supplemental funding to respond to the family reunification challenges it faces. We understand that there is limited statutory authority for the HHS Secretary to transfer funding to support unexpected priorities, but the decision to redirect funding from direct-service programs supporting older adults and caregivers, such as OAA and other aging and disability programs at the Administration for Community Living, puts an already vulnerable population at further risk of hunger, isolation, poor health outcomes, reduced safety and ultimately, diminished independence.

n4a encourages HHS to reverse course and to seek necessary funding through the annual or supplemental appropriations process and to ensure that Older Americans Act and other important aging programs will be funded at levels that enable them to meet a rapidly growing demand for services. Thank you for your consideration of these requests, and we look forward to working with you to ensure sustained investment in the OAA and other key aging programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Markwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal tail stroke.

cc:

Chairman Richard Shelby and Ranking Member Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member,
Senate Appropriations Committee

Chairman Roy Blunt and Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Nita Lowey, House
Appropriations Committee

Chairman Tom Cole and Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro, House Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees