

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
of
AGING ORGANIZATIONS
James P. Firman, Ed.D., Chair

July 15, 2002

Dear Senator:

We understand that the Senate Appropriations Committee will mark-up legislation this week that funds programs administered by these agencies for Fiscal Year 2003. We, the undersigned members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) urge you to show your commitment to our nation's seniors by providing funding at sufficient levels for the federal programs that promote the independence and well being of our older Americans.

For over 35 years the Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and services have improved the quality of life for millions of older adults and their families. These services include home care, protective services, congregate and home-delivered meals, adult day care, case management, legal services, transportation, long-term care ombudsman, and direct funding for tribal elders. Since 1980, there has been a substantial loss in the OAA program's capacity at the state and community levels to provide services to older Americans, primarily due to rising service costs and an increasing number of frail older persons in need of more extensive services. Waiting lists exist across the country for these valuable programs that allow seniors to remain where they want to be – in their homes and communities.

The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), which Congress enacted in November 2000 as part of the OAA reauthorization, recognizes the substantial personal and financial contributions of family caregivers across the country who assist older adults with long term care needs. Uncompensated care by family members allows millions of older adults to avoid moving to institutions and remain where they prefer, in their homes and communities, with a cost savings to the federal government estimated at almost \$100 billion annually. We encourage you to meet the current and future needs of the growing senior population and their caregivers by increasing OAA programs by no less than 10 percent.

Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds go to the states and local communities to provide services primarily to vulnerable, low-income older adults, children and people with disabilities. Many communities depend on the flexibility of SSBG funds to address service gaps and to leverage additional resources for programs that benefit a continually growing older adult population. Since its peak in 1995, funding for the SSBG has steadily decreased to the current allocation of \$1.7 billion. Inadequate levels of funding results in curtailing services for seniors with the greatest economic and social need. We ask for your support in returning SSBG to its previously authorized funding level of at least \$2.38 billion and continue to allow states to transfer up to 10% of their TANF funds.

We recognize the difficult fiscal constraints faced by the Committee, but strongly believe that the programs and services for which we are requesting increased funding are critical to delaying or preventing expensive nursing home care often paid for by Medicaid. We urge you to request an appropriations measure that favorably considers these vital sources of support to the older adults in your State.

AFSCME Retirees
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Association
American Association for International Aging
American Foundation for the Blind
B'nai B'rith International
Gray Panthers
Meals on Wheels Association of America
National Association for Home Care
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Elder Law Attorneys
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Association of State Units on Aging
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council on the Aging
OWL, the voice of midlife and older women
United Jewish Communities