

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
of
AGING ORGANIZATIONS

Barbara Kennelly, Chair

July 7, 2005

Via Fax and Messenger

The Honorable Arlen Specter
The Honorable Tom Harkin

Dear Senators Specter and Harkin:

As you determine FY 06 spending levels for the agencies under the subcommittee's jurisdiction, the undersigned members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) urge you to **increase funding for the services provided through the Older Americans Act (OAA) by at least 10 percent**. We also urge that funding be increased for **Senior Corps** programs, that funding be continued for **Systems Change Grants**, and that funding at least be maintained at current levels for the **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)** program.

OAA programs provide a wide range of home and community-based services that include home care, caregiver support, congregate and home-delivered meals, adult day care, transportation, protections against abuse and neglect, senior center, case management, legal counseling, and community service employment programs. For 40 years these services have successfully enhanced the ability of millions of older persons to live independently. The OAA also supports the long-term care ombudsman program, which protects vulnerable Americans who live in long-term care facilities.

OAA spending saves money in the long run. The programs funded under OAA help older Americans remain independent in their homes and communities, thus avoiding costly institutional care. The nutritional services provided help avert malnutrition and control chronic conditions such as diabetes. OAA funding, however, has not kept pace with inflation and population growth – effectively being frozen for the past several years. Even with efficient utilization of OAA funds, older adults in communities across the nation are on waiting lists for many essential services, such as home-delivered meals and transportation. These gaps in services have been exacerbated in the last several years by cutbacks in state Medicaid and community-services programs as a result of the fiscal problems states have faced. While we appreciate that the House added \$7 million to OAA nutrition programs, it is only about a 1 percent increase. We urge the Senate to do better and include a ten percent increase for nutrition and other critical OAA programs.

We also urge you to continue funding for Systems Change Grants. These programs have made a significant difference in many states in providing greater independence and choice, and permitting seniors and persons with disabilities to remain in their homes and communities. We believe that the grants should be targeted for replicating the most successful programs, based on the evaluations conducted on efforts previously funded.

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With respect to the National Senior Service Corps (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, Senior Companion Program, and Foster Grandparent Program) operated under the direction of the Corporation

for National and Community Service, we encourage you to embrace funding levels, at a minimum, as proposed by the President and adopted by the House of Representatives. These modest increases will create volunteer opportunities for a greater number of older Americans and allow communities to tap the vast resources of their lifetime experience in meeting needs throughout the country.

We oppose the elimination of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program and urge you to at least maintain the program's current funding level. The program provides important senior center and nutrition services to older Americans.

We urge you to recognize the growing needs of America's seniors and demonstrate your commitment to strengthening federal support to help ensure their independence and well-being by increasing funding for OAA and Senior Corps programs, and continuing funding for Systems Change Grants and the CSBG program.

Sincerely,

AFSCME Retiree Program
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Association
American Association for International Aging
American Foundation for the Blind
American Geriatrics Society
American Public Health Association
Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America
Elder Care America
Experience Works
Gray Panthers
Meals on Wheels Association of America
Military Officers Association of America
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors, Inc.
National Association of Senior Companion Project Directors
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Association of State Units on Aging
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.
National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council on the Aging
National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.
OWL, the voice of midlife and older women
United Jewish Communities
Volunteers of America