ACTION ALERT

The Issue – Funding for the Older Americans Act (OAA) has been stagnant for years. The 60 and over population keeps growing and inflation has resulted in cutbacks in services, but OAA funding for basic needs has been frozen. Through the LCAO Invest in Older Americans Campaign, we are urging Congress to increase the OAA funding by 10 percent for Fiscal Year 2008.

Congress will be in recess in early April. We urge you to have face-to-face conversations about the need to increase OAA funding with your Representatives and Senators. The recess dates are: House of Representatives (April 2-13) and Senate (April 2-9).

There are two basic options for you to have that face-to-face conversation:
(1) Attend a town meeting where the member of Congress will take questions. If you don’t know of a scheduled town meeting in your area, call the local office of your Representative or Senator and ask what they have scheduled.
(2) Call the local office and set up your own appointment during the recess period. You will have a greater chance of success if you line up other interested people to go with you.

Urge your Representatives/Senators to:
- Increase funding for all existing OAA programs by 10 percent (about $185 million) in FY08;
- Provide sufficient start-up funding for all new program initiatives in the 2006 OAA reauthorization; and
- Ask your Representatives/Senators if they will send a letter to the Appropriations Committee in support of the LCAO’s request for a 10 percent increase for OAA programs in FY08 (share the attached sample letter with them).

Background – OAA funding in 2007 is about $1.85 billion, very close to its level in 2002. If funding since 2002 had simply kept pace with inflation and the increasing number of seniors, it would be more than $400 million higher this year.

OAA programs help to preserve the health and independence of our nation’s seniors. OAA spending actually saves taxpayers’ dollars by reducing premature nursing home placement, averting malnutrition and controlling chronic health conditions – thus reducing Medicaid and Medicare expenditures.

Feedback – If you do meet with your members of Congress or their staff, please send a brief report to the LCAO Community Services Committee Co-chairs, K.J. Hertz (khertz@n4a.org) and Stephan Kline (stephan.kline@ujc.org).
Overview of Appropriations for the Older Americans Act

Background

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is the backbone of services to America’s aging population. First enacted in 1965, the OAA helps seniors to stay independent and healthy through a wide range of services and programs, including: Meals On Wheels, congregate meals, caregiver support, senior center services, transportation, protection against elder abuse, support for family caregivers, home and community services, health promotion, disease prevention, community service employment for low-income older workers, and grant programs for Native Americans.

With strong support from the aging services organizations, Congress reauthorized the OAA in the fall of 2006, strengthening it in numerous ways and adding important new initiatives. While reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve and expand a law, it does not provide any additional funding. OAA spending levels, like those of most government programs, are set by Congress for each fiscal year through the appropriations process. OAA funding is included in a large annual appropriations bill called the Labor-HHS-Education bill. The aging services organizations that worked for reauthorization are now working to urge Congress to increase the appropriations for all titles of the OAA by at least 10 percent in Fiscal Year 2008.

OAA programs

Following are descriptions of OAA programs and titles:

- **Program Administration (Title II)** – Provides funding to carry out the functions of the Administration on Aging and other initiatives specified under the OAA.
- **Supportive Services (Title III-B)** – Provides services that enable older persons to remain in their own homes and age in place, rather than enter institutions. The most frequently provided services are home health, personal care and transportation.
- **Nutrition Services (Title III-C)** – Provides congregate and home-delivered meals, increasing the health, functionality and quality-of-life for millions of seniors. Approximately 40 percent of home-delivered meal providers have waiting lists.
- **Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program (Title III-D)** – Provides health risk assessments and screenings, nutrition screening and educational services, physical fitness activities, health promotion programs on chronic disabling conditions, counseling, and follow-up health services.
- **National Family Caregiver Support Program (Title III-E)** – Established by Congress in 2000 to help ease the burdens of caregivers through respite care, counseling and supplemental services.
- **Program Innovations (Title IV)** – Provides funding for aging network support, the Alzheimer’s disease demonstration grants and other authorized demonstrations projects to enhance services and supports for older Americans.
- **Senior Community Service Employment Program (Title V)** – Provides part-time employment and training for low-income workers, helping to lift them out of poverty and restore their sense of self-worth. SCSEP also strengthens communities through community service job placements.
- **Native American Grants (Title VI)** – Provides grants to Tribes and Tribal organizations and native organizations for nutrition services (including congregate and home delivered meals), information and assistance, transportation, and in-home supportive services. Title VI also includes the Native American Caregiver Support Program established to assist caregivers of Native American elders who are chronically ill or have disabilities.
• Elder Rights Protection (Title VII) — Provides funding for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program to serve long-term care residents and for elder abuse prevention efforts.

In addition, the 2006 reauthorization added valuable new features to the OAA in the areas of evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention, community innovations in aging in place, transportation services, multigenerational and civic engagement activities, technology-based services, benefits outreach and counseling, community planning and emergency preparedness, and the delivery of mental health screening and treatment services for older individuals, among others. Each of these new initiatives is contingent on start-up funding.

Funding situation

Total appropriations for all Older Americans Act programs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 (October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007) are about $1.85 billion, close to the level for FY02. The funding goes to two agencies: $1.4 billion for activities under the Administration on Aging (in the Department of Health and Human Services), and $483 million for the SCSEP (in the Department of Labor). To put it in perspective, total OAA appropriations are about two-tenths of one-percent of all federal discretionary spending (not including war costs).

OAA funding was basically frozen from FY02 to FY05, and then reduced by 1 percent in FY06 in the government-wide across-the-board cut. Keeping funding flat year after year has caused a serious erosion in purchasing power due to inflation, and has diminished the reach of the programs due to the growing numbers of seniors in need. It is clear that $1.85 billion can not go as far today as it did in 2002.

In FY07 Congress increased OAA slightly. These are the changes made from FY06 to FY07:
  • Added $20 million in nutrition services – a welcome increase but only a drop in the bucket compared to the need;
  • Kept other spending levels for the Administration on Aging the same as FY06; and
  • Included an adjustment of $51.3 million for SCSEP, to cover the expected increase in the federal minimum wage; this money will not expand the number of program slots, but will merely provide the funds needed to pay enrollees at the new minimum wage.

Why is a funding increase needed and what will it accomplish?
  • OAA programs help to preserve the health and independence of our nation’s seniors, enabling them to remain in their own homes longer.
  • Spending money on OAA programs saves taxpayers’ dollars in the long run, because it cuts Medicaid and Medicare expenditures by reducing premature nursing home placements, averting malnutrition and controlling chronic health conditions.
  • If funding since FY02 had simply kept pace with inflation and the increasing number of seniors, it would be more than $400 million higher in FY07, without considering the greater need for services that has arisen because more seniors live in poverty.
  • With flat funding, service providers are faced with difficult choices about which services to cut. Rising fuel costs have hit Meals On Wheels and transportation programs hard.
  • Strengthening the OAA was the top priority of the delegates to the once-per-decade 2005 White House Conference on Aging. Now, the Congress must provide adequate funding for the core OAA programs as well as the new initiatives under the 2006 reauthorization.
Talking Points for Advocates on OAA Appropriations

**OAA Helps People, Saves Money**

- Congress can help more seniors stay healthy and independent in their communities by investing in Older Americans Act programs and services. *(Give local statistics or use anecdotes to help “put a face” on the issue.)* OAA programs and services help older adults:
  - live safely at home
  - make essential trips in the community
  - eat well and stay healthy
  - live with dignity, and
  - avoid unnecessary, more costly care

- Investing in home and community-based care is far more cost effective, in economic and human terms, than paying for Medicare health care claims, Medicaid nursing home bills, or losing the economic and social contributions of older Americans. The cost of home and community-based care is estimated to be one-quarter of the cost of institutional care.

**Stagnant Funding Is Unworkable**

- But there’s a problem! OAA programs’ budgets have eroded over the last several years as federal funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population of individuals in need of services.

- As a result, services funded by these programs have lost considerable service capacity, causing many families to be placed on waiting lists for supportive services, adding to their emotional, physical and financial hardships. *(Mention local statistics and needs!)*

- Demand will only continue to grow as the 77 million baby boomers age. By 2030, 70 million Americans — twice the number in 2000 — will be 65 and older, comprising 20 percent of the U.S. population.

**What Can Congress Do?**

- Increase funding for all OAA programs by 10 percent (about $185 million) in FY08.
- Such an increase would begin to make up for the erosion of federal OAA funds over the past six years, and it would hold existing programs harmless from further funding loss due to a burgeoning eligible population and inflation.
Tips for a Successful Visit to a Member of Congress

1. You want to establish – and then strengthen – a relationship with your legislator and his/her staff. You should prepare thoroughly, be polite, be as specific as possible, and never threaten.

2. Don't be concerned if you end up meeting with staff rather than your member of Congress. In many cases, this can prove to be equally or more productive.

3. Be concise, but cover all the points you wish to make. In general, it is best to address a limited number of issues (three maximum). Most meetings last less than thirty minutes, so budget your time wisely and leave time for discussion.

4. Explain why the issue is important to you and to people in your district/state. Speak from your personal experience and illustrate your points with real people and examples, if possible. Explain the consequences that adverse action or failure to act will have on individuals in your state, city or town.

5. If possible, cite sources of independent support for your position (opinion polls, studies, etc.)

6. After you make your points, request specific action and don't be afraid to ask the legislator's position. If they are currently undecided, ask them to inform you by mail or e-mail when they make a decision, and to tell you why they took the position. If you are asking the legislator to provide leadership in moving something forward, ask him/her to provide you with a response or report on what happens.

7. Leave your name, address, e-mail address, affiliation and telephone number with the member of Congress or staff. Thank them for taking time to meet with you.

8. Follow-up the visit with an e-mail thanking the member of Congress or staffer for their time and briefly summarizing the major issues discussed. Be sure to follow through on any commitments you made and provide any additional information requested. Keep in touch with the member of Congress and staff through occasional correspondence and visits to the local/state office.

9. Share your experiences with the national public policy staff of the aging organization that you relate to. Let them know if there are follow-ups that they should make. Ask them for help if you need it. Send copies of relevant materials to the public policy staff.

10. Remember --- Staying power and relationships are keys to accomplishing anything! Stay in the struggle and strive to maintain good communication with your members of Congress.

For further information on the OAA, contact the LCAO Community Services Committee Co-chairs, K.J. Hertz (khertz@n4a.org) and Stephan Kline (stephan.kline@ujc.org), or visit: www.lcao.org.
Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Walsh / Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

I am writing to request a 10 percent overall increase in appropriations (an additional $185 million) for Older Americans Act programs in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 Labor-HHS Education Appropriations bill.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is the preeminent vehicle that delivers human, social and nutritional services for older persons. It provides funding for such critical programs as Meals on Wheels, congregate meals, senior center services, transportation, protection against elder abuse, support for family caregivers, and jobs for low-income older Americans.

Originally conceived at the First White House Conference on Aging in 1961, it was Congress’ attempt to address concerns about the lack of community services available for older persons and the desire of policymakers to improve the status of seniors. Because of the historical importance of these programs for elderly Americans, delegates to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging supported reauthorization of the OAA as their top priority among more than 70 policy resolutions presented to them. Congress responded with the 15th reauthorization of the program on September 30, 2006.

There now are over 37 million Americans over the age of 65, 12.4 percent of the U.S. population, and this demographic is growing at a faster rate than any other population group. As the Baby Boom generation retires, the number of older Americans will increase to more than 75 million over the next two decades. Even with these staggering figures, appropriations for the Older Americans Act have stagnated since FY 2002 with purchasing power seriously eroded by inflation and the increasing number of seniors in need. If funding since FY 2002 had simply kept pace with inflation and the increasing number of seniors, it would be more than $400 million higher than its current level.

OAA programs help to preserve the health and independence of our nation’s seniors. OAA spending actually saves taxpayers’ dollars by reducing premature nursing home placement, averting malnutrition and controlling chronic health conditions and thus reducing more expensive Medicaid and Medicare expenditures.

While I understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, I hope you will make every effort to increase funding for the innovative and cost-effective Older Americans Act by 10 percent in FY 2008.

Sincerely,