April 19, 2007

Dear Representatives Obey, Lewis, Walsh:

As you determine the amount appropriated for fiscal year 2008 for the Social Security Administration (SSA), the undersigned members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) urge you to adopt the funding recommendations developed by the House Budget Committee including the $213 million supplemental amount designated for Continuing Disability Reviews and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Redeterminations. This funding is essential to address serious backlogs at the agency, to enable it to handle new workloads (e.g., inquiries related to the variable Part B premiums and Part D), and to sustain Social Security as a crucial lifeline for millions of Americans.

The LCAO is a coalition of national non-profit organizations concerned with the well being of America’s older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena. Our 54 members engage in resource sharing and joint advocacy on a range of issues affecting older persons. All told, LCAO members touch more than 134 million Americans through service provision and advocacy.

At the end of FY 2006, there were 1.3 million people awaiting a decision on their initial claim or appeal for Social Security or SSI disability benefits. The agency is understaffed and is having difficulty retaining the staff that it currently has. As a result, the average processing time for hearings has increased dramatically from 308 days in FY 2001 to 524 days in FY 2007. The funding recommended in the Budget Committee resolution (which is $450 million below the amount requested by the Commissioner of Social Security) will only begin to address this situation.

Under the Medicare Modernization Act, SSA has primary responsibility for administering the Medicare prescription drug low-income subsidy. It has been estimated that, despite SSA’s significant outreach efforts, at least 3.3 million low-income Medicare beneficiaries still have not signed up for the extra help for which they are eligible. We are concerned that there seems to be little or no specifically targeted strategy or funding for finding
Representatives Obey, Lewis, Walsh  
April 19, 2007  
Page 2

them and signing them up for this important benefit. To date, SSA has provided no funding for trusted, community-based organizations to do the one-on-one counseling needed to find those who previous efforts have failed to reach. In our view, dedicated funding should be provided by SSA for such community-based organizations to engage in targeted, innovative strategies to find and help those remaining eligible beneficiaries to apply for the significant extra help they are not now receiving.

Continuing Disability Reviews and SSI Redeterminations have been proved to have a positive financial impact on the Social Security Trust Fund (for RSDI payments) and the General Fund (for SSI payments). Thus, the $213 million allocated for these workloads will produce more than this amount in savings. Without this additional funding, these workloads can only be handled at the expense of other workloads, which will increase the already unacceptable backlogs at the agency.

It is essential that SSA receive the full amount allocated by the Budget Committees.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
AFSCME Retiree Program
Alliance for Retired Americans
American Association for International Aging
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
AFT Program on Retirement & Retirees
American Geriatrics Society
American Postal Workers Union Retirees
American Society of Consultant Pharmacists
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and Universities
B’nai B’rith International
Gray Panthers
International Union, United Auto Workers
Military Officers Association of America
National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association
National Association for Home Care & Hospice
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors, Inc.
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
NCCNHR
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council On Aging
National Senior Citizens Law Center
OWL, The Voice of Midlife and Older Women

cc: Appropriations Committee Members-House and Senate
    Appropriations Subcommittees Members-House and Senate
April 19, 2007

The Honorable Robert C Byrd
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Capitol
Washington, DC  20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
  Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies
The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
  Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies
131 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Senators Byrd, Cochran, Harkin and Specter:

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cc: Appropriations Committee Members-House and Senate
    Appropriations Subcommittees Members-House and Senate