

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
of
AGING ORGANIZATIONS

Barbara B. Kennelly, Chair

November 9, 2005

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Via Fax

Dear Representative:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations strongly opposes the Budget Reconciliation bill that the House of Representatives will consider this week, because of the impact its deep cuts would have on seniors and people with disabilities. We have very serious concerns about cutting safety net services for those in greatest need in order to pay for \$70 billion in tax cuts primarily benefiting the wealthiest among us.

The House proposal contains punitive, and inefficiently targeted provisions regarding the transfer of assets under Medicaid. We understand the need to prevent individuals from illegally transferring assets in order to improperly qualify for Medicaid benefits. However, these proposals do not accomplish that goal. Under this proposed legislation, when an unexpected health care crisis hits, seniors and disabled persons could be denied benefits for having helped a laid-off family member make ends meet, provided a down payment for a grandchild's first home or college costs, or helped an elderly sibling or spouse stay in their home. Yet, the asset transfer provisions would have little effect on those who deliberately try to game the system. Although the House package includes hardship waivers that proponents claim would prevent the new rule from denying seniors the care they need, in practice, such waivers do not work, and will subject seniors to uncertain rules.

The House bill contains other provisions that cause concern among the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations groups, including significant new cost sharing for many who are currently exempt and living just above the poverty level; state flexibility to eliminate Medicaid coverage for essential services; and allowing states to implement potentially harmful waivers without any public input or Congressional oversight. All of these proposals leave seniors vulnerable to considerable cost increases and a substantial reduction in core benefits and protections.

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations also opposes the provisions to cut Food Stamps by \$844 million, cutting off up to 300,000 Americans in need, at the same time that recent reports show that hunger in America is growing worse.

In attempting to find ways to pay for the cost of assistance to victims of recent natural disasters, particularly the poor, the sick, and the elderly, it does not make sense to cut the very programs that can help provide that relief. We ask that you vote to oppose this budget reconciliation package which is detrimental to the interests of our nation's most vulnerable people, would not reduce the deficit, and does not reflect the true priorities of the American people.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
AFSCME Retiree Program
Alliance for Retired Americans
American Association for International Aging
American Federation of Teacher Program on Retirement and Retirees
American Foundation for the Blind
American Society of Consultant Pharmacists
Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America
B'nai B'rith International Center
Experience Works
Families USA
International Union, United Auto Workers
Meals On Wheels Association of America
NARFE
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors
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 Senior Companion Project Directors
National Association of Social Workers
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 Aging
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.
National Senior Citizens Law Center
OWL, The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
Service Employees International Union