



# Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

*Barbara B. Kennelly, Chair*

March 28, 2011

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader Pelosi, and Minority Leader McConnell:

The undersigned members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) are gravely concerned that the current Continuing Resolution negotiations may include drastic reductions in critical programs that preserve and build economic security for America's seniors – particularly given the harmful reductions included in H.R. 1. We urge you to oppose these cuts and refuse to turn your backs on seniors in need of help, particularly at a time when so many are struggling to make ends meet.

H.R. 1 includes severe, historic cuts in a number of critical senior programs which should be soundly rejected:

- A \$525 million (almost two-thirds) cut in job training and placement for low-income seniors under the **Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP)** – our nation's only jobs program designed to help older Americans in need. The cut would result in the loss of over 83,000 part-time jobs. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have made a commitment to creating jobs as a means of bolstering the economy. Older workers who have lost a job are more likely than any other age group to face very long-term unemployment and remain jobless for 99 weeks or more. An October 2010 survey by Lake Research Partners and Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) found that 84% of Americans supported or strongly supported "funding programs that help senior citizens find employment," including 90% of Democrats and 79% of Republicans.
- Completely abolishing the **Senior Corps program**, essentially "firing" more than 450,000 senior volunteers nationwide, thereby depleting vital services to the young and old who rely on them. The Foster Grandparent Program connects older volunteers with opportunities to provide mentoring, and support to disadvantaged children. Each year, Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers help 676,000 seniors to live independently, mentor more than 16,000 children and provide assistance to victims of natural disasters. The Senior Companion Program provides the support needed to help thousands of frail seniors remain independent in their homes at a cost much lower than institutional care and also provides much needed respite to family caregivers. In each of these programs, volunteers serve as important community

resources and derive significant emotional and health benefits, which can improve their own quality of life

- A \$551 million cut in the **Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program**. Lack of affordable housing adapted for elders' needs is a long-standing problem that is growing more acute as our population ages. For every unit of federal housing assistance that becomes available, ten seniors are on waiting lists, with increasing numbers homeless. According to a recent survey, 1.3 million elders have worst-case housing needs. The shortage of affordable housing is a major barrier to the transition of nursing home residents back into community-based settings, further straining Medicaid resources. Access to housing assistance often means the difference between being economically secure and sacrificing basic needs
- Extensive reductions in funding for the **Social Security Administration**. Congress reduced this funding by requiring the agency to operate at the FY 2010 level so far this year under a continuing resolution, a \$932 million reduction from what the agency needs to continue operations. H.R. 1 would cut funding by \$1.7 billion. The reduction in operating expenses must come primarily from staff because 80 percent of SSA's operating expenses are devoted to staff salaries. If SSA is forced to reduce costs by furloughing employees, the American public will suffer. New applications for retirement, survivor's and disability claims, as well as new applications for Medicare and "Extra Help" to pay for drug costs, will not be processed, Social Security numbers will not be issued, applicants appealing their disability claims will wait longer for a decision and more beneficiaries calling SSA's 800 number will not be able to connect to help.
- A \$390 million, or two-thirds, cut in the **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** contingency fund, which provides much needed aid during periods of particular severe weather or energy price increases – such as the increases we are currently experiencing. Forty percent of LIHEAP recipients are from households with at least one resident over age 60.
- A \$305 million cut in the **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program**, which assists 2.3 million low-income seniors. Services for seniors currently provided include home care, adult protective services, transportation and nutrition.

We also strongly oppose repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Seniors have a great deal to lose from repealing health reform, as important new benefits include:

1. Significantly reduced prescription drug costs by gradually closing the coverage gap or "donut hole." Nearly 4 million people who entered the donut hole received a \$250 rebate last year. People with Medicare who enter the donut hole will receive a 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs this year and improved coverage of generic drugs.
2. New home care options will permit older Americans to avoid or delay placement in expensive nursing homes and receive care in the environment they choose. In addition, numerous new provisions are included to improve nursing home quality and protect against the growing problem of elder abuse and neglect.
3. A new, free annual wellness visit, which Medicare has never covered before, that includes the development of a prevention plan to keep people with Medicare healthy. Over 150,000 beneficiaries received a wellness visit this year in January and February.
4. Improved care and coordination for people with Medicare that suffer from chronic conditions. About 80% of Medicare beneficiaries have at least one chronic condition such as high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis or diabetes.
5. Improved patient access to primary care doctors, as well as improved training for health care workers who care for Medicare beneficiaries.

6. Elimination of cost sharing for such preventive services as mammograms and diabetes screenings.
7. Strengthening the Medicare program's financial outlook by extending the Medicare trust fund for 12 years.

While we recognize the need for fiscal responsibility and deficit reduction, we must not balance the budget on the backs of seniors in greatest need. We strongly urge Congress to reject cuts in these critical programs. Now is the time to show your support for older Americans.

Sincerely,

AFSCME Retirees  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
Alzheimer's Foundation of America  
American Postal Workers Union (APWU) Retirees  
Association for Gerontology & Human Development  
in Historically Black Colleges and Universities  
B'nai B'rith International  
Center for Medicare Advocacy  
Easter Seals  
Experience Works  
Families USA  
LeadingAge  
Meals on Wheels Association of America  
Medicare Rights Center  
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys  
National Alliance for Caregiving  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors (NAFGPD)  
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs  
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers  
National Association of RSVP Directors (NARSVPD)  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (NASOP)  
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.  
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare  
National Council on Aging  
National Hispanic Council on Aging  
National Senior Citizens Law Center  
National Senior Corps Association  
OWL, The Voice of Midlife and Older Women  
PHI - Quality Care Through Quality Jobs  
Service Employees International Union  
Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE)  
Volunteers of America  
Wider Opportunities for Women