



# Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

*Debra B. Whitman, Chair*

July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014

Dear Representative:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 69 national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena. We write today about the Older Americans Act (OAA).

Signed into law in 1965, the OAA is a primary vehicle for developing, coordinating, and delivering home and community-based services that help older adults maintain their independence. The Act also addresses the high rate of long-term joblessness among seniors; it authorizes the only federal workforce program targeted to help low-income older adults prepare for and obtain employment in the community. Further, when older adults do live in assisted living or nursing home facilities in our communities, the OAA's long-term care ombudsman program works to protect their rights and well-being.

Since the statute's most recent expiration in 2011, LCAO has urged Congress to continue the tradition of a bipartisan, timely reauthorization that upholds the Act's mission to improve the lives of older individuals and family caregivers. Today, we remain committed to that goal and ask the 113th Congress to ensure its completion without delay.

We appreciate your collective efforts to date to advance the OAA reauthorization process. However, we are disappointed with the current lack of momentum to reauthorize the Act in a bipartisan way. We believe that leaving the OAA unauthorized fails to recognize or prioritize the needs of America's seniors. Accordingly, we respectfully ask you to work together to resolve any outstanding issues and to finalize a bipartisan reauthorization bill that reflects the goals of the OAA, reaffirms its mission, and protects its services.

The OAA is cost-effective. By keeping seniors healthy and in their communities, OAA programs can delay or prevent the need for more expensive institutional care, such as that paid for through Medicare or Medicaid, effectively saving taxpayer, state, and federal dollars. In addition to helping seniors age in place, OAA programs improve our country's fiscal future and promote efficiencies within the health care system by preventing unnecessary hospital stays, reducing readmission rates, coordinating care, and managing care transitions.

Each day, OAA programs impact the lives of older adults and family caregivers across the country, bettering their health outcomes while maximizing their dignity and choice. Recent reports indicate that 90% of seniors want to age in their own home, and four out of five older adults believe their current home is where they will always live. OAA services help make this possible, by providing critical supports that keep seniors healthy and independent, and family

caregivers positively engaged and supported. Last year, 92% of OAA home-delivered meal recipients said the program allowed them to continue living at home, while 78% of the family caregivers served by OAA programs reported that these services allowed them to provide care longer than they would have otherwise been able.

Despite these successes and efficiencies, the Act remains unauthorized, suggesting indifference to the services it provides and the lives it improves at a time when demand for OAA programs is projected to rise dramatically. Currently, 41 million Americans are over the age of 65, an 18% increase since 2000. With 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each day, an estimated 80 million Americans will be 65 or older by 2040. Some populations specifically served by the Act's provisions are expanding at an even more rapid pace, such as American Indians/Native Alaskans, whose 65+ population is expected to grow by 116% by 2030. While the population is aging, many older adults face health and economic challenges, making them more likely to need long-term services and supports. This major influx of older adults will enter an already stressed system, as OAA funding has fallen far short of inflation and population growth for over a decade, and current levels are simply insufficient to meet burgeoning needs. Additionally, the OAA is subject to sequestration, resulting in unnecessary and harmful cuts each year through 2021.

We are concerned that as reauthorization continues to stall, the cumulative impact of these economic and demographic pressures could threaten the very sustainability of OAA programs, as well as the health, dignity, and independence of older Americans. Accordingly, we urge you to reaffirm your commitment to current and future seniors, as well as the mission of the Act itself, by reauthorizing the OAA in 2014.

LCAO has played a significant leadership role in past reauthorizations, and we stand ready to work with you to build upon the successes of the OAA in the current reauthorization process and beyond.

Sincerely,

AARP

AFSCME Retirees

Alliance for Aging Research

Alliance for Retired Americans

Alzheimer's Association

Alzheimer's Foundation of America

American Postal Workers Union Retirees (APWU)

American Public Health Association

American Society on Aging (ASA)

Association for Gerontology and Human Development In Historically Black Colleges and Universities (AGHDHBCU)

B'nai B'rith International

Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

Compassion & Choices

Easter Seals

Experience Works

Gray Panthers

International Association for Indigenous Aging (IA2)

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)  
Leading Age  
Lutheran Services in America (LSA)  
Meals On Wheels Association of America (MOWAA)  
Medicare Rights Center  
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA)  
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)  
National Alliance for Caregiving  
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)  
National Association for Hispanic Elderly (ANPPM)  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)  
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)  
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers  
National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors (NARSVPD)  
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)  
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (NASOP)  
National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD)  
National Caucus and Committee for Black Aged, Inc (NCBA)  
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (NCPSSM)  
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care  
National Council on Aging (NCOA)  
National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCOA)  
National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA)  
National Senior Citizens Law Center (NSCLC)  
National Senior Corps Association  
OWL - The Voice for Women 40+  
Pension Rights Center  
PHI – Quality Care *through* Quality Jobs  
Senior Service America, Inc.  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)  
Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC).  
The Gerontological Society of America (GSA)  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)  
Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)  
Women’s Institute for A Secure Retirement (WISER)