



*Debra B. Whitman, Chair*

September 12, 2014

Dear Senator:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 70 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), which expired in 2011.

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 OAA also includes the only federal workforce program targeted to help low-income older adults prepare for and obtain employment in the community, and a long-term care ombudsman program that protects the rights of seniors living in institutions.

In July, 55 LCAO member organizations sent a letter to Congress asking lawmakers to reauthorize the OAA in a bipartisan, timely fashion that both upholds the Act's mission to improve the lives of older adults and family caregivers, and protects its services.

**We write today to strongly urge swift action to complete this process this fall.** Nearly one year ago, the Senate HELP Committee passed a bipartisan bill (S. 1562) to reauthorize the Act. Yet, the bill—and the reauthorization process—remains stalled. Resolving the outstanding Title III funding formula issues that have slowed the progress of this bill should be a priority in the remaining weeks of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. While we know that such issues are rarely easy, we believe that leaving the OAA unauthorized for yet another year fails to recognize or prioritize the needs of America's seniors.

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.

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. 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 to 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Whitman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debra Whitman  
Chair, LCAO