



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

Debra B. Whitman, Chair

July 24, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader
The Honorable Chuck Schumer, Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena. As members of this national coalition, the undersigned organizations urge you to again approve a bipartisan agreement to provide relief from the stringent and arbitrary federal budget caps for FY 2020 and 2021, which were first established in the 2011 Budget Control Act. We believe it is long past time to eliminate the ongoing onerous cycle of budget caps and harmful sequestration debates, but in the short-term we strongly urge you to support and approve the bipartisan agreement that is currently being discussed that would prevent harmful funding cuts.

Failure to Reach a Budget Agreement Will Hurt Older Adults

Should Congress fail to approve a budget agreement, federal funding levels for Non-Defense Discretionary (NDD) programs will fall sharply from \$597 billion in FY 2019 to \$543 billion in FY 2020. A \$54 billion (9 percent) funding cut would have devastating consequences for millions of economically and medically vulnerable older adults and their caregivers by eroding investments in cost-effective federal programs that help to maintain older adults' independence, health and well-being. Additionally, the debate over federal funding for programs that support the health and independence of older adults is happening at a time when the maturing of America's Baby Boomer generation is ushering in a long-term shift in the demographic composition of the country. Every day 10,000 Boomers turn 65. Since 2004, the population of older adults has increased by over 30 percent, and by 2030, 74 million—or one in five—people in America will be 65 or older.

Among this growing population of older adults, an estimated 80 percent has at least one chronic condition; 4.6 million live in poverty; the unemployment rate of low-income older workers is nearly three times higher than the overall jobless rate; and nearly 9.5 million seniors are threatened with hunger. Now is precisely the time to be investing *more* in proven, trusted, and cost-effective strategies to meet the current and future needs of this

rapidly growing population. Congress must reach an agreement to prevent overall federal funding cuts that would jeopardize vital NDD programs supporting older adults and caregivers.

There are many federal NDD investments that are important to older adults and caregivers and are at risk if lawmakers fail to approve a budget deal. For example, **Older Americans Act (OAA)** services, which are funded through the federal Administration on Aging (AoA), are the foundation of our nation's home and community supports system. Every year, OAA provides more than 11 million older adults with much-needed services that include home care, congregate and home-delivered meals, case management, caregiver support, transportation, health promotion and disease prevention, legal services, elder abuse prevention, community service employment opportunities for low-income older adults, and ombudsman programs that help protect residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Unfortunately, OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population eligible for services. This financial reality has made it increasingly difficult for the Aging Network to even maintain existing services, let alone meet escalating needs and keep up with a growing population. In fact, stagnant or declining federal funding since 2010 has eroded the current capacity of the network to address the needs of older adults to the point where *it would require a 23 percent funding increase for OAA programs to simply restore the service capacity that has been lost since austerity measures were implemented under the 2011 Budget Control Act*. Failing to reach a budget agreement for FY 2020 and 2021 would ensure that even fewer older adults and caregivers receive these critical supports when they most need them.

There are many other federal programs that support economically and medically vulnerable older adults and that are at risk unless Congress implements a budget agreement. These include, but are not limited to:

- Critical block grant programs such as the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) that provide flexible grants to communities to provide nutrition, transportation and adult protective services, among others, supporting older adults and other populations;
- Housing assistance to nearly 2 million low-income seniors through HUD Section 202 and other housing assistance programs;
- Home heating and cooling assistance for more than 2 million older adults through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP);
- Evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention services to help older adults manage chronic conditions, improve their health and wellness, and prevent falls; and
- Senior Corps volunteer programs that have harnessed the talents of millions of seniors in meeting critical needs in communities everywhere.

Moreover, a federal funding cut in the magnitude of \$54 billion would drive increased costs within other federal programs, such as Medicaid and Medicare, resulting from premature nursing home placement for seniors who can no longer stay in their homes and communities, poorer nutrition and health, increased falls, and other avoidable crises. For example, if the service capacity of discretionary community-based programs, such as those of the Older Americans Act, erodes due to declining federal funding, more seniors may be at risk of Medicaid-financed long-term institutionalization, medical emergencies and hospitalizations paid under Medicare, and increased utilization of other nutrition and income support programs.

While we recognize the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, we respectfully ask you to recognize the importance of programs that improve the health and well-being of older Americans and their families and commit to passing the bipartisan budget agreement to prevent widespread and devastating funding

cuts. Failing to raise the arbitrary, harsh budget caps will mean that the valuable services that protect older Americans against hunger, isolation, poor health, neglect, abuse, unemployment and other challenges will fail to reach the growing population in need of these services. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you to ensure sustained adequate investment in the OAA and other key aging programs.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
Aging Life Care, Inc.
Alliance for Aging Research
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Foundation of America
AMDA - The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine
American Association of Service Coordinators
American Foundation for the Blind
American Geriatrics Society
American Society on Aging
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America
B'nai B'rith International
Easter Seals, Inc.
Gerontological Society of America (The)
International Association for Indigenous Aging IA2
Jewish Federation of North America (The)
Justice in Aging
LeadingAge
Meals on Wheels America
Medicare Rights Center
National Adult Day Services Association
National Adult Protective Services Association
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Association for Home Care and Hospice
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors, Inc.
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Council on Aging
National Indian Council on Aging
National Senior Corps Association
PHI-Quality Care Through Quality Jobs
Social Security Works
Volunteers of America
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement

cc: Members of the Senate and House