



Leadership Council
of *Aging Organizations*

Richard J. Fiesta, Chair

September 18, 2023

Dear Members of Congress:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 68 national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in policy-making arenas. LCAO thanks you for your efforts to support older Americans as they age at home and in the community.

LCAO urges Congress to fully fund programs and services supporting older adults across the country. These programs are critical to helping older adults live with dignity, health, and independence. Ongoing and increased investment is of paramount importance to address existing shortfalls and the impact of inflation, increase availability to assist the growing older adult population, and improve and expand access to services for at-risk older adults and their caregivers. We support the proposals to maintain and expand upon fiscal year 2023 appropriations.

We encourage you to work towards timely passage of final FY 2024 appropriations bills with robust funding levels for the Older Americans Act (OAA), Elder Justice Act (EJA), and other key programs within the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Transportation (DOT), Agriculture (USDA), Justice (DOJ), and AmeriCorps that prioritize and promote the dignity, health, and independence of older adults and ask you to consider LCAO's funding requests.

We continue to urge Congress to fund the Social Security Administration's (SSA) administrative budget at no less than the President's request of \$15.5 billion for FY2024. Americans rely on SSA - especially frontline staff - to access, understand, and address any issues of concern with their earned Social Security benefits. Years of inadequate funding, in some years not even enough to keep up with fixed-cost increases, staffing losses and increased workloads, has resulted in deteriorating customer service levels represented by extensive delays in processing disability requests, long lines at field offices, and high call wait times. Funding below \$15.5 billion, as is being considered in Congress, would worsen this ongoing situation. More than 70.3 million people receive monthly benefits from SSA that they rely upon, and 10,000 more become eligible for benefits each day. Failure to properly fund SSA in the face of this reality jeopardizes the ability of SSA to fulfill its purpose to the American public. We strongly urge Congress not to impose additional hardship on the American public and instead fund SSA at no less than the Administration's requested level.

LCAO also strongly supports the proposed \$150 billion investment in Medicaid home and community-based services. This critical funding would help older adults and people

with disabilities live with dignity and choice, create quality jobs for home care workers, and enhance support for family caregivers. We support the \$278 million requested reporting requirements and funding for the Adult Quality Measurement and Improvement Program and new HCBS Measurement Program. Consistent reporting across measure sets would best allow CMS and states to assess and improve quality, outcomes, and equity. Additionally, LCAO strongly supports the proposal for SSA and CMS to jointly pilot efforts to improve Medicare enrollment, including for those who are not already collecting Social Security, and to explore opportunities to eliminate remaining post-enrollment coverage waits, such as the need to receive a mailed Medicare card before connecting with one's earned benefits. Lastly, with respect to Medicare Low Income Programs, we request \$5.8 billion to (1) Align MSP and LIS eligibility methodologies to reduce administrative barriers, ease enrollment processes, and eliminate duplicative eligibility determinations; and (2) Align the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) renewal period with other Medicaid groups to promote parity, reduce the risk of churn, and improve maintenance of eligibility.

We respectfully ask you to recognize the importance of programs that improve the health and well-being of older Americans and their families. Without your investment in these discretionary initiatives, the valuable services that prevent and reduce hunger, isolation, poor health, neglect, abuse, unemployment and other challenges among older Americans will fail to reach the aging population in need of these services.

LCAO requests that in FY 2024, all these programs will be funded at levels that enable them to meet a rapidly growing demand for services, and that current threats to these vital programs will be rejected. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you to ensure sustained investment in key aging programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard J. Fiesta". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Fiesta