



Leadership Council
of *Aging Organizations*

Richard J. Fiesta, Chair

January 16, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
The Honorable Robert Scott
Committee on Education & the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Edward Markey
The Honorable Roger Marshall
Subcommittee on Primary Health and
Retirement Security
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Burgess Owens
The Honorable Frederica Wilson
Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Development
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairs Sanders, Markey, Foxx, and Owens and Ranking Members Cassidy, Marshall, Scott, and Wilson:

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 encourages elected officials to support older Americans as they age at home and in the community

We write to you today on LCAO's support for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) in alignment with the principles of bold investment, innovation and flexibility, diversity and equity, and a bipartisan process. The OAA is the major federal discretionary funding source for home and community-based services for older adults and their caregivers. This current reauthorization provides an opportunity to reassess the OAA's strengths and challenges in meeting the needs of a rapidly growing number of older Americans, particularly those with the greatest social and economic need.

Programs supported through the OAA include home-delivered and congregate nutrition services, in-home supportive services, transportation, caregiver support, community service employment, health and wellness programs, the long-term care ombudsman program, services to prevent the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults, and other supportive services. These programs provide vital support for those older adults who are at significant risk of hunger, social isolation and losing their ability to remain in their own homes and communities, or who need support and advocacy in long-term care facilities.

In addition, OAA funds resource centers that support the work of the Aging Network by addressing a variety of needs, including access to benefits, elder justice, multigenerational service and volunteering, legal services, financial literacy, long-term care ombudsman training, and targeted services to minority and special populations in need.

To develop and implement the wide array of OAA services, a system of federal, state, and local agencies and organizations, known as the Aging Network, was established. The core of the Aging Network is the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA), 56 State and Territorial Agencies on Aging, 614 Area Agencies on Aging, more than 280 Title VI Native American aging programs, and more than 20,000 community-based service provider organizations. This critical aging infrastructure is an important part of the backbone of our nation's support system offering assistance to older adults.

Supported by the OAA, the Aging Network has successfully served millions of older adults in the community and in long-term care facilities since 1965 and is positioned to assist the country's growing aging population to remain healthy and active in their communities. With each reauthorization, the OAA has been adapted, often with inadequate funding, to reflect the changing needs of this growing population, innovations in the field, and advances in research and technology. Further, the Aging Network and its services have the potential to save the Medicare, Medicaid, and Veterans Administration programs billions of dollars each year by enabling older adults to remain in their homes and communities and out of hospitals and long-term care facilities.

The goal of the following LCAO recommendations is to authorize the Assistant Secretary for Aging, the Administration on Aging and programs across the country to fulfill the OAA's promises by ensuring they have the resources, direction and flexibility to meet the needs of our nation's aging population. LCAO's recommendations do not require major changes to the OAA's core services or eligibility requirements. The coalition, which has played a significant leadership role in past reauthorizations, is committed to a reauthorization that will strengthen the OAA and build the capacity of the Aging Network.

Priority Principles

LCAO recommends four priority principles moving into recommendations that preserve and protect the efficiency and flexibility inherent in the OAA. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress in supporting older adults across the nation and will share in-depth recommendations as the process moves forward.

Bold Investment in the OAA. Programs funded by OAA have long demonstrated a unique ability to provide quality services. Evidence shows that the cost-effective OAA services provided by the Aging Network keep older adults out of crisis and in the community with significant savings to Medicare and Medicaid.

Yet investments in the Act have declined since 2010, when OAA funding was at its highest. While we recognize that authorizing funding for the Act does not ensure that appropriators will meet those recommendations within their appropriations bills, we encourage Congress to include authorization amounts for OAA programs and titles that more accurately reflect the need for services and the significant population growth that is occurring and will continue for the foreseeable future.

We recommend that lawmakers increase annual authorization over the five-year reauthorization period to reflect corresponding increases in the older population, rising need for services, and inflation's impact on the cost of delivering these vital services .

We further urge Congress to invest in cost-effective, innovative services with funding that keeps pace with costs and inflation. We look forward to further discussions on how such funding will benefit a greater number of older adults while accruing a cost savings to Medicare, Medicaid, and other health and long-term services and supports payers.

Innovations and Flexibilities. OAA funding and flexibilities during and after the COVID-19 public health emergency allowed the programs to innovate, adapt and find new ways to efficiently and effectively serve older adults and caregivers. LCAO recommends consideration of continuing some of these flexibilities in reauthorization and amending the Act to ensure that pandemic-era innovations can continue. We urge Congress to take this opportunity to listen to the field on what a truly modern OAA should look like.

Diversity and Equity. A cornerstone of the OAA is meeting the needs of those who are most at-risk - populations of greatest social and economic need. LCAO recommends updating these definitions and providing the aging network the tools it needs to better meet the needs of all older people, including people of every sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion, national origin, disability, and ethnic background.

Bipartisan Process. The OAA has enjoyed a rich history of bipartisan support and benefited from bipartisan reauthorization processes. Given the importance of supporting older adults and caregivers in all communities across the country, and the value the Act brings to those state and local efforts, LCAO supports a bipartisan process that considers all valid viewpoints and reflects the expertise of those who carry out the Act's mission.

In conclusion, we respectfully ask you to recognize the importance of programs that successfully and effectively improve the health and well-being of older adults and their families. We appreciate your leadership and support for OAA programs and services. Thank you for your consideration of these guiding principles and we look forward to working with you towards OAA reauthorization.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Fiesta