



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

William (Larry) Minnix, Jr., Chair

September 6, 2006

The Honorable Mike DeWine
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
Subcommittee on Retirement Security and Aging
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Tiberi
The Honorable Ruben E. Hinojosa
Subcommittee on Select Education
House Education and Workforce Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeWine, Ranking Member Mikulski, Chairman Tiberi and Ranking Member Hinojosa:

As you consider the pending Older Americans Act (OAA) reauthorization legislation now being negotiated between the House and Senate, the undersigned members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) would like to express our appreciation for your hard work to ensure the OAA reauthorization is completed this Congress. As you know, the LCAO made numerous recommendations to Congress on the reauthorization of OAA, including increasing authorization levels by at least 25 percent above current FY 2006 funding levels to reflect inflation and ensure that the aging network has the necessary resources to adequately serve the projected growth in the numbers of older adults.

We understand that the House-Senate negotiations to reach a final agreement on the OAA reauthorization bill will resume following the August recess. With this in mind, the undersigned members of the LCAO, a coalition representing the views of 53 national non-profit organizations dedicated to America's older population, would like to point out key aspects of the House and Senate legislation, H.R. 5293 and S. 3570, which we would like to see retained in the final agreement considered by Congress this session. The following suggestions are in order of their appearance in the OAA bills.

In addition to encouraging swift passage of OAA reauthorization this fall, we ask that you support the following provisions as part of the final agreement:

1. Expand eligibility and increase authorization levels for the caregiver support programs.

The Senate bill includes specified increases for the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) and the Title VI Native American Caregiver Support Program, which we support. We also prefer the Senate provision to expand eligibility for the NFCSP to older adults caring for an adult child and the House provision expanding eligibility to caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease of any age.

2. Integrate the principles of the Choices for Independence initiative throughout the Act.

Both bills include important principles of the Choices for Independence initiative throughout the legislation; however, we prefer the House approach since it integrates this initiative throughout the OAA utilizing the

existing aging network as the foundation for delivering services. We believe the aging network has already engaged in the transformation of the long-term care service delivery system that is envisioned under Choices and is poised to implement these programs on a nationwide basis, which have already been proven successful as demonstration projects.

3. Postpone any action on encouraging the distribution of multivitamin-mineral supplements until scientific research is conclusive and funding is adequate.

We prefer the Senate version because it does not include a multivitamin supplement provision for congregate meal sites. We have two key concerns with respect to the multivitamin supplement provision in the bill passed by the House. First, a report issued by the National Institutes of Health, in May, concluded that more rigorous scientific research is needed before strong recommendations can be made regarding multivitamin-mineral supplement use to prevent chronic diseases in the general population. This report brings in question the safety of distributing supplements en masse (such as in a congregate meal program), especially in the older adult population, which typically has a higher prevalence of chronic diseases and higher use of prescription drugs. Second, while the language does not require that a multivitamin supplement be included, we remain concerned that limited funds, which are already insufficient in light of increased demands on the program, will be diverted from food to pay for this optional component.

4. Provide new Title IV grants to enhance resources and technical assistance to aging service programs.

There are five new or amended sections under Title IV of the Senate bill, which would provide expanded resources and technical assistance to the aging network in a number of critical areas. They include grants to support community innovations for aging in place, improve transportation services for older adults, promote multigenerational and civic engagement activities, promote technology-based services and supports designed to assist the frail elderly, and deliver mental health screening and treatment services for older individuals. We encourage you to retain these important new grant initiatives under the final agreement. We also support the provision in Title IV that would enable the Administration on Aging to support efforts to prepare communities for the aging of the population, which is contained in both bills.

5. Maintain a balanced approach to changes under the Title V Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

Both the House and Senate bills have sought to take a balanced approach toward making changes to the Title V older worker program. But overall, we prefer the Senate's approach to SCSEP. In particular, we support the longer aggregate participation time limit of 36 months with the exception for 20 percent of participants. We support the provision that would give priority to project participants who are 65 years or older and individuals with specified barriers to employment such as disability, limited English proficiency or literacy skills, and residence in rural areas or areas of high unemployment, among others. We believe the Senate bill more strongly emphasizes the integral nature of community service positions under SCSEP and how these positions benefit both older individuals and the community.

6. Enhance elder justice activities on a comprehensive nationwide basis.

We support the new funds authorized under both the House and Senate bills to carry out public education and outreach to promote financial literacy and prevent identity theft and financial exploitation of older individuals. We also support the additional provisions under the Senate bill, which would authorize new grants to States and Indian tribes to strengthen long-term care and provide assistance to elder justice programs. These new funds would enhance elder abuse prevention and detection, case review and assistance, volunteer programs, and

multidisciplinary elder justice activities, among others. Finally, we also support the Senate provision that provides grants to improve, streamline and promote uniform collection of data on elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Thank you for considering our views on behalf of America's seniors.

Sincerely,

*Alliance for Aging Research
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Association
American Association for International Aging
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
American Federation of Teachers Program on Retirement & Retirees
American Society on Aging
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and Universities
B'nai B'rith International
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Eldercare America, Inc./National Alliance for Caregiving
Families USA
The Gerontological Society of America
International Union, UAW
Meals On Wheels Association of America
National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors, Inc.
National Association of Senior Companion Project Directors
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Association of State Units on Aging
National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council On Aging
National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.
National Senior Citizens Law Center
OWL, The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
United Jewish Communities*

cc: The Honorable Michael Enzi
The Honorable Edward Kennedy
The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
The Honorable George Miller