



advocacy | action | answers on aging

**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

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September 17, 2019

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chair
The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici, Chair
The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services
House Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, Chairwoman Bonamici
and Ranking Member Comer:

On behalf of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), which represents the country's 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and is an advocacy voice for the more than 250 OAA Title VI Native American aging programs, we write today in strong support of the Committee's bipartisan legislation to update and reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA) through 2024.

The Dignity in Aging Act, H.R. 4334, co-sponsored by Chairwoman Bonamici (D-OR), Ranking Member Comer (R-KY), and Representatives Elise Stefanik (R-NY), Susie Lee (D-NV), Susan Wild (D-PA) and Dusty Johnson (R-SD), represents the diligent work of your Committee Members and staff to secure broad and bipartisan support, to recognize the realities of our aging population, and to responsibly update a landmark Act that supports millions of older adults and caregivers in communities across the nation.

n4a additionally appreciates the Committee's recognition of what is already working in the Act, including its unique delivery structure and intentional emphasis on local flexibility. In giving careful consideration to the daily realities and expertise of our practitioner members, among others in the Aging Network, the Committee has shown the utmost respect for the Act's critical value to older adults and caregivers, as well as for those professionals and volunteers who work every day to support them.

As you well know, the OAA is the cornerstone of the nation's non-Medicare home and community-based services (HCBS) system,

providing older adults with much-needed supports, including in-home care, congregate and home-delivered meals, adult day care, information and referral assistance, case management, transportation, legal services and caregiver support/respite. The demand for these services is growing in every community as the older population continues to grow, and while the law's provisions are comprehensive and effective, OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing population eligible for services. In fact, stagnant or declining federal funding since 2010 has eroded the current capacity of the AAA and Title VI network to address the needs of older adults to the degree that it would require a 23 percent funding increase in FY 2020 for OAA programs to simply restore the service capacity that has been lost since FY 2010.

We must acknowledge the following provisions in H.R. 4334, as they are among the most important provisions in the bill and reflect many of n4a's recommendations, which we shared with Congress in March.

- **We very much appreciate the annual increases in the authorized funding levels.** A lack of adequate funding is the number one barrier our members face in meeting the needs of older adults and caregivers, and with the rapidly increasing numbers of older adults in every community, the bill's recommendations to increase core programs by seven percent in year one and six percent in subsequent years is an excellent starting point for appropriators to heed. Additionally, n4a appreciates the return to a five-year authorization period, which provides greater stability and allows the Aging Network to focus on achieving the Act's goals, rather than divert time to advocacy to renew a law that works so well.
- Part of any reauthorization is updating the law to reflect changing times. Section 204 is an excellent example of this, whereby **the bill makes clear that Area Agencies on Aging can engage in emerging opportunities to serve greater numbers of older adults through non-OAA funding streams.** Examples include contracts with health care payers to provide meals or transportation to a Medicare Advantage client, the establishment of private-pay programs for those who can afford to purchase OAA-like services when OAA resources are limited or unavailable, or similar mechanisms that serve the goals of the Act while operating outside of it. The bill also makes clear the role of the Assistant Secretary on Aging in continued encouragement and training to the Aging Network on these matters of business acumen, innovation and changing models of health care and social services.
- **We also commend the Title VI Native American aging program provisions in H.R. 4334.** By allowing for the Administration on Aging to create demonstrations around a broader array of Supportive Services than most Title VI aging programs can currently provide—and just as importantly, providing increased funding to do so—the bill will help tribes build capacity and better serve the needs of the Native American and Native Hawaiian elders they serve. The inclusion of \$500,000 in additional training funds is also critical, so that the Assistant Secretary on Aging can better support all tribes with training, technical assistance and capacity-building activities.
- By including a **robust new research and demonstration authority for the Administration on Aging (AoA) in Title IV**, the bill's authors recognize the difficulty of improving performance, developing new models and producing data-

driven assessments of the value of the OAA programs and services when the formerly robust Title IV has been allowed to wither on the vine over the past decade. By providing new research direction to AoA and a dedicated new funding authority of \$20 million a year, Sec. 207 of the bill is another vital modernization provision.

- While a smaller measure, **the removal of a 10 percent cap on serving grandparents and other older relative caregivers** under the Act's Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program is also valued by n4a members, who made it a priority for this reauthorization. The removal of the arbitrary cap reflects the growing realities of the opioid epidemic and the need for sufficient state and local flexibility to serve these older caregivers who face uniquely challenging caregiving burdens.
- The research base on the negative health outcomes from **social isolation and loneliness** only continues to grow, documenting the risks to the health and well-being of older adults. n4a appreciates the bill's thoughtful addition of language in multiple places in the Act to recognize the challenge we face, as well as the fact that many core OAA programs already address social isolation and promote social engagement.
- n4a had requested a minor change to ensure that Area Agencies on Aging have access to a state's cost-sharing policy or guidance. Section 205 of the bill accomplishes this.

We will not note the many other provisions in the bill—many of which we support or take no position on—but will again reiterate our thanks that our members' concerns and realities are reflected in this final product.

Thank you for your leadership in crafting an OAA update that ensures that the Act's innovative, efficient programs enabling older Americans to live at home and in their communities for as long as possible continues to be a lifeline in communities across the country. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me or n4a's policy staff at 202.872.0888.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandy Markwood". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping tail on the "d" at the end.

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc:

Members of the House Committee on Education and Labor