



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

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House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Markup
H.R. 4334 – Dignity in Aging Act
H.R. 4301 – School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Wednesday, September 18, 2019 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, the Committee is considering two pieces of legislation: H.R. 4334, the *Dignity in Aging Act*, and H.R. 4301, the *School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act*.

The first bill before us today – the *Dignity in Aging Act* – is a bipartisan proposal to reauthorize the *Older Americans Act*, or O-A-A, which expires at the end of the month. O-A-A was first passed in 1965, alongside Medicare, Medicaid, and landmark civil rights laws, as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiative.

Today, O-A-A supports an array of popular community-based programs that help 11 million aging Americans retain independence and avoid costly institutional care. This includes 3 million older Americans who regularly look to O-A-A services for basic needs, such as Meals on Wheels and transportation services.

But, as the population of Americans age 60 and over has grown, funding for O-A-A has not kept pace. In 2010, O-A-A funding was \$42.95 per senior in today's dollars. Today, it is just \$27.25 per senior.

As a result of eroded funding, O-A-A services do not reach 83 percent of low-income older Americans who experience food insecurity, according to a 2015 GAO report.

Congress must recommit to providing critical services and care to aging Americans. To that end, this reauthorization of the *Dignity in Aging Act* does the following.

It authorizes robust funding increases for O-A-A programs, which will help expand access to food assistance, transportation, and other basic services that a growing population of seniors need to live independently and with dignity. All O-A-A programs will receive an immediate 7 percent increase in fiscal year 2020 (FY2020) and a 6 percent increase in each of the following four years. This will boost funding for O-A-A to the Act's historical high watermark.

This bipartisan proposal also recognizes the vital role of family caregivers in supporting aging Americans. It extends the authorization of the *RAISE Family Caregivers Act*, which requires the development of a national strategy to recognize and support family caregivers and improves the process for determining what types of support caregivers need.

The bill also includes a new and vital focus on the direct care workforce – to ensure that the workforce needs of the growing aging population can be met.

Finally, the *Dignity in Aging Act* puts a stronger focus on combating social isolation, which greatly increases the risk of stroke, heart disease, dementia, and premature death. The bill empowers local organizations to test solutions for social isolation and adds screening into the health and supportive services that seniors receive.

By passing this reauthorization, we can help millions of Americans across the country age with dignity and I encourage all Committee Members to support it.

I want to recognize and thank Ms. Bonamici, Ms. Stefanik, Ms. Lee, Mr. Comer, Ms. Wild, and Mr. Johnson for their work and leadership on this vital, bipartisan legislation.

The second bill before us—the *School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act*—will help us better understand how to prevent tragic school shootings.

As this Committee discussed during last week’s hearing on trauma-informed school practices, children in the United States face the devastating trauma of gun violence more frequently than anywhere else in the world.

Yet, we have consistently failed to pass legislation that would protect students, educators, and school staff.

The Committee has a responsibility to advance evidence-based legislation that ensures the safety of our schools. Today, Committee members will have the opportunity to go beyond thoughts and prayers and take a concrete step towards policies to prevent gun violence.

The *School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act* specifically establishes a standard definition of “school shooting,” which currently does not exist in federal law. By doing so, both policymakers and the public will be able to objectively assess school gun violence incidents and the policy solutions we implement to stop them. The bill also directs the Department of Education to use this definition to report annually on school safety indicators for school shootings. These indicators capture critical statistics and information on not only school mass shootings, but also the chronic gun violence that threatens students each day.

While this legislation, alone, will not eliminate school gun violence, it will help us better understanding how and why school shootings occur and what can be done to stop them.

This is a small, but important step towards ensuring that classrooms are safe places where parents can have peace of mind and children are free to learn.

I urge all Members of the Committee to support both of these bills under consideration today and I now yield to the Ranking Member, Dr. Foxx, for the purposes of making an opening statement.