

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
of
AGING ORGANIZATIONS

Barbara B. Kennelly, Chair

November 30, 2005

Via Fax

The undersigned organizational members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) are writing in support of the highest House and Senate passed funding levels for the Older Americans Act under the FY06 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) provides many services that make a real difference in the lives of older Americans, such as meals programs, support for family caregivers, senior center services, home care, job training and placement, and protections against elder abuse, among others. Unfortunately, funding for OAA programs has been largely frozen for years, failing to keep pace with inflation, the growing numbers of seniors in need, and increasing energy and transportation costs. Frozen funding year after year translates into serious cuts in services – in this case the services that keep America’s seniors healthy and independent. Congress should address the serious under funding that diminishes these vital programs and jeopardizes the health and safety of seniors who depend on them. Specifically, we urge you to:

- Support the House proposal for nutrition spending, which raises all three OAA nutrition program budget lines by 1%, a total funding increase of just over \$7 million. A new USDA report shows the fifth consecutive annual increase – the worst increase since 2000 – in the number of Americans suffering from hunger and without resources to purchase an adequate diet.
- Support the Senate proposal to increase the National Family Caregiver Support Program (Title III E of OAA) by \$5 million. Caregivers have enormous physical, financial and emotional burdens and need more help to keep their loved ones at home.
- Support the Senate proposal to increase funding for Protection of Vulnerable Older Americans (Title VII) by \$1 million. This includes support for nursing home ombudsman and elder abuse prevention programs.
- Support the Senate funding level of \$40.5 million for Aging Research and Training (Title IV), a \$2.7 million decrease from FY05. The House proposal would make a larger reduction of \$19 million.

In addition to the above modest increases for OAA programs, we urge you to consider the following for FY06:

- Support the Senate proposal to continue funding for System Change Grants, which promote state innovations to enable seniors and persons with disabilities to remain in their homes and communities, thus providing greater independence and choice.
- Support the Senate proposal to maintain the Community Services Block Grant at the current spending level. The House cuts would jeopardize important senior center and nutrition services to older Americans.

- Support the House proposal to fund the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) state block grant at \$2.006 billion (the Senate includes \$1.883 billion) and the Senate's proposal for \$300 million in additional contingency funds that can be released at the president's discretion. It is critical that Congress act to provide the highest level of LIHEAP assistance in anticipation of this winter's projected spike in energy costs.
- Increase funding for local community service organizations and SHIPs to assist seniors with the new Medicare prescription drug benefit. Seniors need one-on-one counseling assistance, and while community groups and SHIPs are working with CMS and AoA to provide this support, additional resources are needed to meet the rapidly growing requests for help.
- Support the Senate's proposal to restore \$29.5 million in funding for the geriatric health professions program, contained in Title VII of the Public Health Service Act. The House version eliminated virtually all spending for Title VII programs, including geriatrics. As we face a worsening shortage in the geriatric workforce, these programs leverage funding to provide training to geriatricians and other geriatric providers.
- Support funding levels consistent with the President's proposed increases for Senior Corps programs as contained in both the House and Senate versions of the bill to create more senior volunteer opportunities

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

Sincerely,

*AFSCME Retiree Program
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Association
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
American Federation of Teacher Program on Retirement and Retirees
American Geriatrics Society
Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores
Catholic Health Association of the United States
The Gerontological Society of America
International Union, United Auto Workers
Meals On Wheels Association of America
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
National Association for Home Care and Hospice
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 Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council On Aging
National Senior Citizens Law Center
Service Employees International Union
United Jewish Communities*