

United States Senate

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you consider the Subcommittee's funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2021, we urge you to increase funding by at least 12 percent above FY 2020 levels for programs authorized under the Older Americans Act (OAA). Your past support for OAA programs has been critical in providing vital assistance for millions of older Americans. With the historic aging of our nation's population, increased funding for OAA programs is particularly important now and in the years to come.

As you know, OAA is the major federal vehicle for the delivery of social and nutrition services for more than 11 million older Americans. These programs include congregate nutrition services, home-delivered nutrition services (i.e., "Meals on Wheels"), supportive and transportation services, activities to promote socialization and wellness at senior centers, employment and community service through the Senior Community Service Employment Program, vulnerable elder rights protection, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, and family caregiver support.

The demand for these programs is great, and in many areas of the country, vulnerable seniors are on waiting lists for services that they desperately need. Meanwhile, the cost of living – particularly for food, medication, and housing – continues to increase for seniors. Moreover, the demand is only expected to increase. Today, there are more than 73 million Americans aged 60 years and older, the largest cohort of seniors in American history. The U.S. Census projects that these trends will continue for the next few decades, and by 2050, the number of Americans aged 60 years and older will increase to more than 108 million.

Investing in OAA services saves taxpayer dollars by reducing premature and costly Medicare and Medicaid expenditures resulting from unnecessary nursing home placement or hospitalizations due to poor nutrition and chronic health conditions. There are few better investments than the OAA programs that millions of older adults rely on for a healthy and dignified life. Regretfully, federal funding for OAA programs has failed to keep pace with inflation and the growing need, despite the cost-effectiveness and significant return on investment of these critical programs.

At a minimum, a 12 percent increase (\$252 million) over FY 2020 enacted levels would recognize the increased costs of services over the past decade. A 12 percent increase, though insufficient to address the significant growth in the senior population, would be an important step toward meeting existing demand.

We realize you face very difficult fiscal constraints. However, we ask that you consider the value and need for OAA services, and fund these programs at the highest possible levels.

We greatly appreciate your consideration, and we look forward to working with you to ensure a sustained investment in OAA services and programs.

Sincerely,

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator

JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senator

TOM UDALL
United States Senator

ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator

TINA SMITH
United States Senator

MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator

TIM KAINE
United States Senator

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
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CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO
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