

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 29, 2012

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Shelby:

Thank you for your work in supporting the many important national priorities funded in the FY 2013 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill. As it is more important than ever that Older Americans Act (OAA) programs stay strong in the coming years, we respectfully request that you consider increasing the programmatic funding levels for OAA programs in this legislation.

The need for OAA programs among older adults and caregivers could not be greater than during these difficult economic times. There are now 40 million Americans over the age of 65, or approximately 13% of the total U.S. population, and there are now 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each and every day. Senior hunger continues to grow while the costs of food and fuel rapidly increase, which has led to a staggering 20% increase in senior hunger in the past decade. In addition, adults 55 and older continue to struggle to find employment and had a 2010 reemployment rate of 38%, the lowest of any age group. Meanwhile, the fastest growing segment of the aging population is individuals over 85. These are the most vulnerable older adults, who most tend to need the long-term services, supports and protection from abuse, neglect and financial exploitation that are provided under the OAA.

Despite this obviously growing need, the Title V (Senior community service employment program) jobs program and the Title IV (Activities for health, independence and longevity) grant programs have been cut in recent years, and some programs under Title VII (Allotments for vulnerable elder rights protection activities) have never been funded.

Federal funding levels for nutrition and supportive services have failed to keep pace with inflation or the growth in our aging population. Since FY 2004, OAA appropriations have lagged behind the rising costs of fuel, commodities and wages, while demand for services to older Americans has increased, leading to a substantial and growing shortfall. Programs are reporting waiting lists for things like home-delivered meals. In order for these vital programs to simply

Americans has increased, leading to a substantial and growing shortfall. Programs are reporting waiting lists for things like home-delivered meals. In order for these vital programs to simply catch up with the growth in the senior population and the increased costs of services over the past decade, its budget would have to be increased by at least 12%.


As you know, there are few better investments than these cost-effective programs that are needed by millions of older adults. Investing in OAA initiatives saves taxpayer dollars by reducing premature and costly Medicaid and Medicare expenditures that result from unnecessary nursing home placement or poor management of nutrition and chronic health conditions. Therefore, as you and your colleagues prepare the bill, we respectfully request that you consider the importance of these programs and increase their funding levels to reflect the demand and costs for the services they provide.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



MARK BEGICH
United States Senator



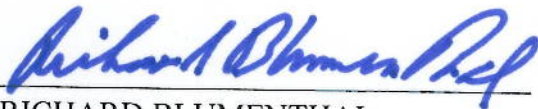
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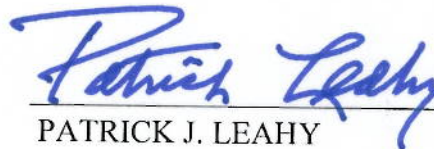
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