

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies  
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

We are writing to request an overall increase of at least nine percent in appropriations (at least an additional \$184 million) for all Older Americans Act (OAA) programs in the fiscal year (FY) 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations bill.

The OAA is the preeminent vehicle that delivers human, social and nutritional services for older persons. It funds critical programs and services to keep older adults independent, including Meals On Wheels and congregate meals, home and community-based care, senior center services, family caregiver support, prevention of elder abuse, community service jobs for low-income seniors, transportation, the long-term care ombudsman program, legal services, services for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, and research and training.

Originally conceived at the first White House Conference on Aging in 1961, it was Congress' attempt to address concerns about the lack of community services available for older persons and the desire of policymakers to improve the status of seniors. Because of the historical importance of these programs for elderly Americans, delegates to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging supported reauthorization of the OAA as their top priority among more than 70 policy resolutions presented to them. Congress responded with the 15<sup>th</sup> reauthorization of the Act on September 30, 2006.

There now are more than 37 million Americans over the age of 65, nearly one in 10 of whom live below the poverty line, and this demographic is growing at a faster rate than any other population group. As the Baby Boom generation retires, the number of older Americans will increase to more than 75 million over the next two decades. Even with these staggering figures, appropriations for the Older Americans Act have seen little increase since FY 2002 with purchasing power seriously eroded by inflation and the increasing number of seniors in need.

Aging programs have had to absorb increases in operating costs over the past several years due to such factors as rising food costs, insurance premiums and gas prices, as well as being entrusted with new responsibilities without resources such as assisting Medicare beneficiaries. Additionally, labor costs for many aging programs have risen, due to the mandated federal minimum wage increase.

OAA programs help to preserve the health and independence of our nation's seniors. OAA spending actually saves taxpayer dollars by reducing premature nursing home placement, averting malnutrition and controlling chronic health conditions and thus reducing more expensive Medicaid and Medicare expenditures.

While we understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, we hope you will make every effort to increase funding for the innovative and cost-effective Older Americans Act by at least nine percent in FY 2009.

Sincerely,

C. H. [Signature]

Blanche R. Lincoln

Barack Sanders

Maria [Signature]

Ron Wyden

Mark [Signature]

Bill Nelson

Norm Feingold

Robert A. [Signature]

[Signature]

Ben Cardini

Cue [Signature]

John F. Kerry

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Sheldon Brown

George V. [Signature]

Jon [Signature]

Noam Coleman

Herb Kohl

Robert [Signature]

Chuck Scherer

Sam DeLoach

Paul Gopher

Amy Kloubach

Jay Ruppel

Edward M Kennedy

Bob Carey, Dir

Susan Collins

Jack Reed

Debbie Stabenow

John Johnson

Pat Roberts

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John Sauer

Cheri Damm

Patrick Leahy

M. Mi