

August 8, 2008

Contact Your Senators and Representatives

Urge Them to Support a Stimulus Package that Contains Emergency Funding for OAA Programs

Congress is on recess for the rest of August and advocates must use that time to build support for a supplemental appropriations bill targeted to help jump start the ailing economy and meet the increased demand for safety net supports.

A "first draft" of a Senate supplemental spending measure released in late July includes \$40 million for OAA senior nutrition programs, which is a big victory. But we must keep up the grassroots pressure for the rest of this month to build support for that measure moving at all, as there is not yet enough bipartisan support in both chambers to ensure a floor vote.

When Congress re-convenes in September, it will be for three short weeks before adjourning for the elections...and possibly for the rest of the year. In other words, we have a short window of opportunity to secure anything other than last year's funding for OAA and other key programs, so please act today!

gt; Wondering how the regular appropriations bill fit into this scenario?
See n4a's July 17 Advocacy Alert for an update:
<http://www.n4a.org/advocacy/alerts/?fa=view-article&id=202>

Action Steps to Take

1) Call Congress. Call 202-224-3121 to connect to the U.S. Capitol Switchboard and then ask for your Representatives/Senators by name. (To find contact information for their Washington, DC offices, visit: www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.) Ask them to ensure that emergency OAA funding for aging programs is part of any economic stimulus bill Congress considers. If you are calling Republican offices, emphasize the need for a stimulus bill in particular.

2) Put the Need in Writing. Customize the following letter and send it to your Representatives and Senators' DC offices via fax (on your agency's letterhead) or email. This step is even more important than calling, as you are providing the Member's office with a written record of the need in your community and a suggested response.

3) Motivate Others. Ask other advocates to do the same! Urge colleagues, advisory board members, volunteers and clients to make calls and send faxes/emails to their Senators.

4) Reach Out Directly to Members of Congress. If your Members host town hall meetings or public forums during August, please attend (or send a member of your advisory board) and raise this issue. If you can, get a visit with the legislator's local office and make your case directly.

Sample Letter

Dear Representative/Senator [NAME]:

On behalf of the [#####] older adults and caregivers that the [NAME OF AAA/Title VI program] reaches every year through a wide range of home and community-based services, I am writing to urge you to support emergency funding for Older Americans Act aging programs as part of a second economic stimulus package.

The recent economic downturn is even worse news for agencies like ours, not to mention the vulnerable older adults we serve, as OAA funding has not kept pace with inflation or the growing aging population. As fuel and food costs rise ever higher, we are struggling to maintain our programs, yet those same costs drive increasing numbers of older adults to our door.

ADD LOCAL DATA HERE ON THE CHALLENGES YOU ARE FACING DUE THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN. For example, mention any waiting lists for services, offer an example of how increased fuel costs have squeezed your budget and your services, explain how your volunteer or paid workforce is affected, etc.]

And we are not alone. Based on a national survey conducted by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging between June 10-17, over half of all Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and Title VI Native American aging programs have been forced to make cutbacks in services this year. Over 73 percent of agencies reported it is more difficult to retain volunteers and over 74 percent said it is more difficult to recruit volunteers. The survey also found that without additional resources, 90 percent of AAAs and 100 percent of Title VI programs expect to have to make cutbacks in 2009 due to rising fuel costs and food prices.

Please support emergency funding for these vital local programs that offer older adults nutritious meals, rides to the doctor, home health visits, and other supports that allow them to live independently in their homes and communities. The alternative to funding this home and community-based care through OAA — unnecessary institutionalization, with the average older adult spending down to Medicaid within six months — places a much higher human and financial cost on individuals, families and the federal government.

AGENCY NAME] appreciates your efforts to direct emergency funding to the critical Older Americans Act programs that are facing rapidly mounting and unsustainable costs, so that we can continue to help older adults live healthy and independent lives for as long as possible.

Sincerely,

Your Name, Agency and Address

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