



July 30, 2024

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Members
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of the National Council on Aging (NCOA), I am pleased to convey our support for the Manager's Amendment to S. 4776, Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2024, scheduled to be considered by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on July 31, 2024. We applaud the extensive dialogue and bipartisan negotiations which produced this legislation, and we urge the Committee to favorably report the legislation and the full Senate to pass it expeditiously.

NCOA's reauthorization priorities, articulated in our March 7 testimony to the Committee, included honoring the commitment to multipurpose senior centers, expanding the reach of healthy aging programs and strategies, strengthening our nation's care infrastructure, and expanding the only federal program focused on the employment of low-income older workers. We appreciate that our proposals were reflected as follows:

1. **Senior Centers:** Absent the restoration of a separate title or creation of dedicated funding stream, NCOA supports the assurances provided regarding III-B expenditures, and additional language in the bill enhancing the role of community-based organizations in OAA service delivery and strategies.
2. **Healthy Aging:** To expand the reach of health promotion and disease prevention services, NCOA advocated for expanding the continuum of programs funded under the OAA to include those that are "evidence-informed." We also support the expansion of falls prevention demonstration authority, improvements in language related to mental health and infectious diseases, options to deliver medically-tailored meals, and safe and healthy homes.
3. **Direct Care Workforce:** NCOA appreciates the inclusion of our request to strengthen authorities for sustained funding for the Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center.
4. **Older Workers:** NCOA welcomes the authorization levels that call for annual increases in Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) investments; highlighting the role that the program plays in supporting the aging services workforce, and the GAO report to distinguish SCSEP from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We believe failing to expand eligibility to additional older workers facing age discrimination and struggling to meet basic needs is a missed opportunity and continue to be concerned with the false narrative of program failures embedded in the punitive language related to grant competitions.

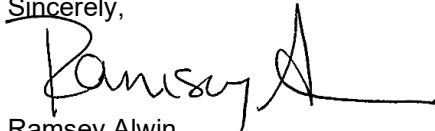
5. Federal leadership and coordination: NCOA applauds the thoughtful authorization of the next White House Conference on Aging, but still advocates for the inclusion of an authorization for a National Strategic Plan for Aging and incentives for states to create Multisector Plans for Aging.

A commitment to the Older Americans Act now and for the future is crucial. NCOA applauds the annual increase in each year's authorization level. However, robust subsequent appropriations are crucial to address the exploding demographic demand and cost for services and are key to the success of the new services and strategies proposed in this legislation.

Chronic conditions are the leading cause of frailty, disability, and death in the United States, and 80 percent of older adults experience two or more. Post-pandemic, older adults continue to struggle with social isolation and loneliness. However, multipurpose senior centers, which are hubs of engagement in communities across the country, continue to be underfunded, particularly in areas of greatest need. Older adults also continue to struggle with long-term unemployment of 27 weeks or longer at higher rates than their younger counterparts. As of June 2024, one million older workers aged 55 and older were still unemployed, compared to 19 percent of workers aged 16 to 54.

The National Council on Aging continues its decades-long commitment to the OAA and stands ready to continue our collaboration to advance this reauthorization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ramsey Alwin", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ramsey Alwin
President and CEO

cc: Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee