

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education, and Related  
Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

We write to ask you to support employment opportunities for older Americans by providing adequate funding for the Department of Labor's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). As you prepare the Fiscal Year 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we ask that you include at least \$540.3 million for SCSEP—the full amount authorized for FY24 in the bipartisan 2020 Older Americans Act reauthorization.

SCSEP is the only federal employment program dedicated to helping older Americans return to the workforce. Through the program, low-income older job seekers from every state learn new work skills and contribute to their communities through paid community training at schools, hospitals, senior centers and other non-profit or public facilities. Each year, approximately 55,000 older Americans with significant barriers to employment train at community employers and earn paychecks through SCSEP.

SCSEP is meeting the goals established by Congress: to promote individual economic self-sufficiency and to increase unsubsidized employment of unemployed Americans age 55 and older. Every older adult who participates in SCSEP increases their individual economic self-sufficiency through the regular paychecks they earn during their training assignments. In addition, about half of SCSEP participants enter into unsubsidized employment after exiting the program. This high rate of success is despite the fact that SCSEP serves the most-in-need seniors, including those with low employment prospects (93% of all SCSEP participants), many of whom are homeless or at-risk of homelessness (62%), who have disabilities (26%), or who reside in rural areas (24%) or areas of persistent unemployment (12%). Additionally, 10% of SCSEP participants in Program Year 2021 were veterans.

SCSEP participants who exit for employment earn more in their first year than the annual SCSEP training costs, resulting in a strong return on the federal investment, according to a 2017 Urban Institute study.

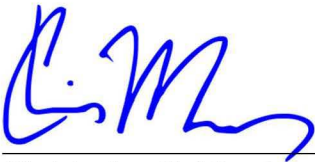
The need for SCSEP remains critical, as it takes unemployed older adults much longer to return to the workforce than their younger counterparts, and even longer for most-in-need older adults with low employment prospects. As of February 2023, 20.4 percent of unemployed workers age 55 and older were long-term unemployed (27 weeks or longer) while 16.9 percent of unemployed workers age 16 to 54 faced the same length of unemployment.

A 2019 U.S. Senate Aging Committee report found that age discrimination, inadequate training opportunities, and other factors make it more difficult for older workers to find jobs and thrive in the workplace. Coupled with a looming retirement savings crisis, where roughly one-third of workers do not have access to a retirement plan at work and the majority of older Americans do not have nearly enough savings, it is crucial that we continue to invest in this vital program.

Three-quarters of SCSEP funding is spent on wages with the requirement that participants receive the federal or local minimum wage, whichever is higher. Historically, when the federal minimum wage was increased, Congress responded by increasing SCSEP investments to ensure the program can continue to serve the same number of older workers. In recent years, as states and localities have increased their minimum wages, SCSEP funding has not kept pace with those increased expenses. Nationwide, the number of available participant slots has decreased by 3,080 since 2017. At a minimum, SCSEP investments need to grow to ensure the same number of older adults can remain in the program.

Please help to ensure job training for older workers continues by robustly funding the Senior Community Service Employment Program in FY 2024.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



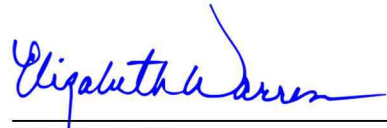
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



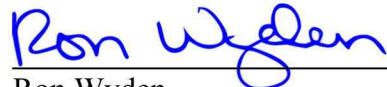
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



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Ron Wyden  
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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
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*Mark Kelly*

Mark Kelly

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