January 21, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Senator Burr and Senator Sanders:

n4a is pleased to offer our endorsement of your bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). On behalf of our members, the more than 620 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and 256 Native American aging programs in the U.S., and the millions of older adults and caregivers they serve, thank you for working in an expedited and bipartisan fashion to develop this legislation so early in the 114th Congress.

Thank you also for your commitment to continuing the progress made through your efforts and achievements in the 113th Congress by introducing a bill that reflects the years of work and compromise that lawmakers, advocates and other stakeholders invested in the previous bipartisan reauthorization bill. While we do not comment directly on changes to the funding formula that have diverse effects on our members, we appreciate your collective work to find a solution that all Senators can support, ensuring that the reauthorization is accomplished without further delay.

As advocates, we recognize that the major demographic challenges ahead for our nation demand increased investment in cost-effective home and community-based services, which help meet the needs of the nation’s increasing older population. Our members work on the front lines of aging every day delivering OAA programs and services that are critical to ensuring that older Americans can age successfully with independence in their homes and communities for as long as possible. They are also charged with planning ahead for demographic shifts and
crafting the best responses to address the needs of older adults and their caregivers, such as building livable communities for all ages.

Although n4a, like other aging organizations, had advocated early on for additions to the Act, we recognize that the overarching priority is achieving bipartisan consensus and support to reauthorize the OAA and maintain investment in OAA programs that are critical to keeping older adults in their homes and communities. Our members also understand better than most just how well the Act works right now, and that, aside from greater public and private resources, dramatic changes are not necessary at this time.

We greatly appreciate the numerous times you and your staff took into consideration the perspective of AAAs and Title VI aging programs in reaching a bipartisan consensus bill, both in your home states and via n4a’s national perspective. n4a is pleased that this bill also reflects a commitment to exclude unfunded mandates or unnecessarily burdensome requirements on the local agencies charged with responding to the needs of local older adults and caregivers, and that the bill maintains the Act’s essential provisions regarding local flexibility.

In particular, n4a thanks you for addressing the following issues in the bill.

- The need for improved federal, state and local coordination of person-centered transportation services, with authorization of federal technical assistance.
- The addition of elder abuse prevention and screening training, as well as updated definitions to better support the prevention of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- Updating long-term care ombudsman guidelines to make clearer the need to prevent and remedy conflicts of interest, while not undermining how the program works at the local level currently.

n4a looks forward to working with you and the other members of the Senate HELP Committee to advance this vital legislation to ensure that older Americans get the support they need to age successfully at home and in their communities.

Sincerely,

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Members of the Senate HELP Committee