



July 30, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chairman  
The Honorable Bill Cassidy, Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of USAgings, the national association representing and supporting the national network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and advocating for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs, we write today in strong support of the recently introduced bipartisan legislation to update and reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA) through FY 2029.

The Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2024 (S. 4776) represents the diligent work of your Committee Members and staff to secure broad and bipartisan support to responsibly update a landmark Act that supports millions of older adults and caregivers in communities across the nation.

OAA is the cornerstone of the nation's non-Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) system, providing older adults with much-needed supports, including in-home care, congregate and home-delivered meals, information and referral assistance, case management, transportation, legal services and caregiver support/respite.

This critical update to the Act should reflect the needs of today's older adults and the Aging Network that supports them. USAgings appreciates the bill's recognition of what is already working well in the Act, including its unique delivery structure and intentional emphasis on local flexibility.

**We especially commend the following provisions in S. 4776, which are much needed and reflect USAging's members' top priorities.**

- **Title VIII Authorization of Appropriations:** USAging is pleased to see recommended increases to these vital programs, especially in the face of a growing population and rising need. While much more funding is needed to carry out the changes made to the law and to ensure high-quality program and service delivery, we appreciate the bipartisan show of support for annual steady increases over the authorization period.
- **Section 106 Contracting and Grant Authority:** USAging provides our highest endorsement for the language in this section, which represents the best interests of all levels of the Aging Network and the older adults they serve both within and outside of the Act. By correcting the problematic language in Section 212 of the Act that has created numerous and ongoing issues at the state and local level, the bill clearly defines and reinforces the appropriate role of State Units on Aging (SUAs) when OAA funds are leveraged by AAAs or providers. It also reinforces the critical autonomy that AAAs must be allowed when they do *not* leverage OAA funding to be able to expand services to more older adults. We especially thank Senators Braun and Kaine for their leadership on this issue.
- **Section 203 Evidence-Informed Practices:** USAging strongly supports these important updates related to Title III D's health promotion and disease prevention programs. This modest provision would expand the Aging Network's ability to reach older adults with emerging interventions and to extend the reach of the interventions, especially in rural areas and other areas which have limited funding for this important work. We especially thank Senator Braun for his leadership on this provision.
- **Section 206 National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults:** USAging commends the Committee for recognizing the value of social engagement programming for older adults in order to help them maintain positive health outcomes, and the corresponding need for critical training and technical assistance to the Aging Network

professionals providing that social engagement support in the Act. This provision builds on and complements language added in the Act in 2020 to make social engagement a priority across the statute. We thank the Committee for including this language in the manager's amendment and Senator Murphy for his leadership on this important issue.

- **Section 303 Grab-and-Go Meals:** We strongly support codifying the added flexibility around grab-and-go and similar innovative nutrition service delivery methods reflected in the new OAA regulations and appreciate the Committee's updates to reflect maximum local flexibility in terms of where such meals may be provided. We thank Senator Casey for his leadership on this and other nutrition issues during this reauthorization.

While we did not note all the other provisions in S. 4776 that we support—or those we would prefer to be changed or removed—we must close on a missed opportunity. This reauthorization process did not include a serious policy conversation about the value of unifying the two Title III C funding streams or building in real opportunity for AAAs and providers to continue to innovate and develop new approaches and models in the nutrition program. We look forward to having those discussions with the Committee, the House and other advocates as the OAA reauthorization process advances.

We greatly appreciate and thank you for your leadership throughout the reauthorization process, including taking a bipartisan approach to bill development and offering multiple opportunities for public comment. We must commend your respective excellent staff, who always took the time to hear the USAging perspective, which allowed us to provide the local aging leaders' perspective on this vitally important piece of legislation and the impact any changes will have on older adults and caregivers who rely upon OAA programs and services.

We look forward to championing S. 4776 and working with the House Education and Workforce Committee to advance a bipartisan OAA reauthorization as soon as possible.

For questions about these comments, OAA or USAging's members, please contact Amy Gotwals, USAging's Chief, Public Policy and External Affairs, at [agotwals@usaging.org](mailto:agotwals@usaging.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Markwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandy Markwood  
Chief Executive Officer

cc:  
Senate Special Committee on Aging