October 18, 2013

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair, Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair, Senate HELP Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander, Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Burr:

n4a is pleased to offer our endorsement of S. 1562, your bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). On behalf of our members, the 618 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and 246 Native American aging programs in the U.S., and the millions of older adults and caregivers they serve, thank you for working in a bipartisan fashion to develop this legislation.

It must be said that, as advocates, we initially desired a more ambitious bill to address the major demographic challenges ahead for our nation and the need to invest in cost-effective home and community-based services to help meet those challenges. 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.

However, n4a recognizes the limitations of the current budget environment and the corresponding need to scale back the boldest ideas in order to achieve bipartisan consensus and support. 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 do appreciate the numerous times you and your staff took into consideration the perspective of AAAs and Title VI aging programs in developing this bill, both in your home states and via n4a’s national perspective. n4a is pleased that S. 1562 does not contain 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 and a GAO study.
- 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.
- And while our suggested language to update the Aging and Disability Resource Center definition was not fully included, we do appreciate the Committee’s more modest changes that improve upon current law.

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 community.

Sincerely,

Sandy Markwood
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Members of the Senate HELP Committee