



October 1, 2013

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education  
Labor, and Pensions  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernard Sanders  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Harkin, Alexander, Sanders and Burr:

On behalf of the National Council on Aging (NCOA), I am writing to express support for the bipartisan process you have forged to advance the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) and urge the Committee to favorably report S. 1562, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2013, to the Senate.

As you know, the OAA expired in 2011, and reauthorization is a crucial opportunity for Congress to modernize and improve services by supporting efficiencies and innovations, reassessing the Act's successes and limitations, and addressing its ability to effectively serve older Americans in need. It also enables Congress to reaffirm its support for the Act and the efforts of the Aging Services Network to empower older adults to retain or improve their health and economic independence so they can remain in their own homes and communities.

A number of NCOA's priority issues are reflected in the legislation, although they have unfortunately been scaled back since the introduction of S. 1028 in May. We appreciate the inclusion of provisions to create new support for modernizing multipurpose senior centers, require that health promotion and disease prevention initiatives be evidence-based, and promote chronic condition self-management and falls prevention. We are also supportive of the inclusion of stronger elder justice and legal services provisions, needed clarity for caregiver support and Aging and Disability Resource Centers, and new opportunities for intergenerational shared sites.

It is also significant that the bill in its current form does no harm and does not include provisions that we oppose, or that would keep the bill from receiving broad bipartisan support on the Senate floor. For example, the most significant reason why the Act has not yet fully realized its true potential has been a lack of resources. We are pleased that S. 1562 rejects attempts to reduce OAA authorized funding levels and preserves the ability to make key investments through 2018.

We are, however, disappointed by the missed opportunity to respond to new challenges presented by the growing numbers and diversity of our nation's seniors through innovative, evidence-based practices.



Over 23 million Americans aged 60+ are economically insecure, and nearly half of those over 65 would be in poverty were it not for Social Security. Provisions in S. 1028 that would have enhanced the aging network's ability to meet these growing needs by modernizing critical systems and supports designed to assist older adults experiencing economic distress are not included in S. 1562, such as those that defined economic security and established it as an explicit priority in the Act's objectives, provided for federal coordination of elder economic security programs and identification of best practices, and focused on economic security strategies in the development of state and area plans. These provisions deserve strong bipartisan support.

Nevertheless, NCOA believes that important, modest improvements remain in the bill and that the bipartisan process should continue to move forward. We hope that there will be additional opportunities to strengthen the bill, and we urge that that controversial proposals that might sidetrack the successful reauthorization of the OAA be rejected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Firman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "J" and "F".

James Firman  
President and CEO