



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

James Firman, Chair

December 15, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leaders McConnell, Schumer and Pelosi:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 70 national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America's older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena.

We are writing to urge you to use the time between now and the new December 22 continuing resolution deadline to reach a bipartisan, bicameral agreement – similar to those in 2013 and 2015 – to avoid sequestration and raise the spending caps imposed by the Budget Control Act (BCA). Specifically, we call on Members of Congress to ensure that any agreement to raise the caps:

1. Maintains parity between defense and non-defense discretionary programs (NDD);
2. Ensures the cost of funding relief does not increase poverty and inequality, or reduce or create impediments to healthcare coverage; and
3. Applies equitable 302(b) funding allocations for individual appropriations bills.

Non-defense discretionary (NDD) spending is slated to fall to its lowest level on record as a percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and investments in the programs on which older adults rely have failed to keep pace with their growing numbers and increasingly complex needs. Since 2004, the population of older adults has increased by over 30 percent, and by 2030, 74 million – or one in five – people in America will be 65 or older. Among this rapidly growing population of older adults, more than 90 percent has at least one chronic condition; 4.2 million live in poverty; one in six seniors faces the threat of hunger; and older workers age 55 and over continue to struggle with unemployment longer than their younger counterparts. Yet, appropriations for proven and cost-effective NDD programs, such as the Older Americans Act (OAA), which help address the social and economic needs of our nation's seniors, have been declining at a time when demand for its services and supports has never been greater.

Some of the cuts proposed in aging services in the FY 2018 bills portend what the caps would mean for our nation's seniors. These include the elimination of the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), a \$100 million cut in the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), a \$500 million cut for the Social Security Administration, a 38 percent cut in Chronic Disease Self-Management Education, a 20 percent cut in elder justice, and more than a 10 percent cut in geriatrics workforce and caregiver education.

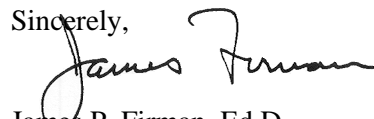
Investment in the NDD programs that serve seniors, particularly those of the OAA, enable older adults to remain independent and healthy in their own homes and communities, where they prefer to be and where they are less likely to need more costly hospital and institutional care. They also help protect residents who must live in nursing homes and assisted living facilities through the long-term care ombudsman program.

However, relief from the BCA caps should not come at the price of undermining income supports for older adults, people with disabilities, and their families. Offsets that reduce health care coverage or affordability, or limit access to income supports that combat poverty and inequality, should not be used for a temporary, two-year deal. Given our nation's demographic and economic realities, Congress should instead adopt fiscal solutions that would strengthen the financial and health security of older adults, and reject proposals that would worsen the already fragile economic and health status of older Americans and their families, which includes both the protection of current and future Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries.

Finally, raising the budget caps will only benefit older Americans and others who rely on supportive services for their health and economic security if the relief is applied equitably. After the last BCA deal was reached, appropriations bills that support individuals and communities received disproportionately smaller increases; the allocations for the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and the Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development appropriations bills increased by less than 4 percent. Low-income programs received less than half the average increase of other NDD programs. The programs on which older adults rely can be found in multiple appropriations bills, including Labor-HHS, Agriculture, and Transportation-HUD, as evidenced in the letter articulating our FY18 priorities: <http://www.lcao.org/files/2017/07/LCAO-FY18-Appropriations-Letter-063017.pdf>.

We encourage you to swiftly adopt a budget deal that eliminates the threat of sequestration, maintains parity, avoids permanent offsets that threaten American's health and economic security, provides equitable relief, and allows the FY 2018 appropriations process to be completed, providing for much-needed investments for older Americans, their families, and their communities.

Sincerely,



James P. Firman, Ed.D.
President & CEO, National Council on Aging
Chair, Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

cc: Senate Appropriations Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Leahy
Senate Budget Chairman Enzi and Ranking Member Sanders
House Appropriations Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey
House Budget Committee Chairman Black and Ranking Member Yarmuth