

Support Older New Yorkers: Increase Funding for Food, Jobs, and Care Now!

April 4, 2008

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Walsh:

As aging service providers and organizations that advocate on behalf of older New York residents, we are writing to request an overall increase of at least nine percent in appropriations (at least an additional \$184 million) for all Older Americans Act (OAA) programs in the fiscal year (FY) 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations bill.

The OAA is the preeminent vehicle that delivers human, social and nutritional services for older persons. It funds critical programs and services to keep older adults independent, including Meals On Wheels and congregate meals, home and community-based care, senior center services, family caregiver support, prevention of elder abuse, community service jobs for low-income seniors, transportation, the long-term care ombudsman program, legal services, services for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, and research and training.

Originally conceived at the first White House Conference on Aging in 1961, it was Congress' attempt to address concerns about the lack of community services available for older persons and the desire of policymakers to improve the status of seniors. Because of the historical importance of these programs for elderly Americans, delegates to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging supported reauthorization of the OAA as their top priority among more than 70 policy resolutions presented to them. Congress responded with the 15th reauthorization of the Act on September 30, 2006.

There now are more than 37 million Americans over the age of 65, nearly one in 10 of whom live below the poverty line, and this demographic is growing at a faster rate than any other population group. As the Baby Boom generation retires, the number of older Americans will increase to more than 75 million over the next two decades. Even with these staggering figures, appropriations for the Older Americans Act have seen little increase since FY 2002 with purchasing power seriously eroded by inflation and the increasing number of seniors in need.

Aging programs have had to absorb increases in operating costs over the past several years due to such factors as rising food costs, insurance premiums, and gas prices, as well as being entrusted with new responsibilities without resources such as assisting Medicare beneficiaries. Additionally, labor costs for many aging programs have risen, due to the mandated federal minimum wage increase. Further, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is mandated to pay all seniors minimum wage in the program, and therefore must see an increase in funding to be able to serve at least the same number of low-income seniors currently being served.

OAA programs help to preserve the health and independence of our nation's seniors. OAA spending actually saves taxpayer dollars by reducing premature nursing home placement, averting

malnutrition and controlling chronic health conditions and thus reducing more expensive Medicaid and Medicare expenditures.

While we understand the difficult fiscal constraints under which you are operating, we hope you will make every effort to increase funding for the innovative and cost-effective Older Americans Act by at least nine percent in FY 2009.

Sincerely,

Broome County Office for Aging (Binghamton, NY)
Cortland County Older American's Advisory Board (Cortland, NY)
Dutchess County Office for Aging (Poughkeepsie, NY)
Fulton County Office for Aging (Johnstown, NY)
Genesee County Office for the Aging (Batavia, NY)
Greene County Department for the Aging (Catskill, NY)
Herkimer County Office for the Aging (Herkimer, NY)
Lewis County Office for the Aging (Lowville, New York)
Livingston County Office for the Aging (Mt. Morris, NY)
Madison County Office for the Aging, Inc. (Canastota, NY)
Nassau County Department of Senior Citizen Affairs (Uniondale, NY)
New York Alliance for Retired Americans (Latham, NY)
New York Association of Homes & Services for the Aging (Albany, NY)
New York City Department for the Aging (New York, NY)
New York State Association of Area Agencies on Aging (Albany, NY)
Niagara County Office for the Aging (Lockport, NY)
Office for the Aging / Youth Bureau (Warsaw, NY)
Onondaga County Department of Aging and Youth (Syracuse, NY)
Otsego County Office for the Aging (Cooperstown, NY)
Putnam County Office for the Aging (Carmel, NY)
Rensselaer County Unified Family Services Departments of Aging, Veterans and Youth (Troy, NY)
Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services (Schenectady, NY)
Schoharie County Office for the Aging (Schoharie, NY)
Schuyler County Office for the Aging (Montour Falls, NY)
Seneca Nation of Indians (Irving, NY)
Steuben County Office for the Aging (Bath, NY)
Steuben County RSVP (Bath, NY)
St. Lawrence County Office for the Aging (Canton, NY)
St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Office for Aging (Hogansburg, NY)
Tompkins County Office for the Aging (Ithaca, NY)
Warren/Hamilton Counties Office for the Aging (Glens Falls, NY)
Washington County Office for Aging and Disabilities Resources (Fort Edward, NY)
Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services (Mount Vernon, NY)
Westchester County Health and Wellness Coalition (Mount Vernon, NY)
Yates County Office for the Aging (Penn Yan, NY)