

Testimony of Autumn Campbell re: Older Americans Act (OAA) Programs
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
March 8, 2017

Thank you Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro and Members of the Committee.

My name is Autumn Campbell and I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to discuss my strong and continued support for protecting funding for the Older Americans Act (OAA).

I am here today to speak on behalf of my own experiences as a former caregiver for my mother, and the importance of OAA services in enabling me to keep her at home. However, I should note that my experiences also deepened a passion for aging issues, and I currently serve as the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), where I have the privilege of advocating on behalf of local Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American aging programs that deliver OAA programs in nearly every community across the country.

I always knew that at some point, I was going to be taking care of my mother. I am an only child and she was a single parent for most of my life. As she approached her sixties on a teacher's salary, I knew that she wouldn't have the financial resources to live out her retirement solely independently, and that I would have a big part in ensuring she was adequately cared for and happy in her later years.

However, I never thought that time would arrive when I was 32. Unfortunately, shortly after she turned 60, she developed a very quickly progressing and devastating neurodegenerative disorder that, over two short years, robbed her of all physical and cognitive capacities. This diagnosis also sent me scrambling to figure out how to provide care for my mother as her abilities declined and she could no longer care for herself. After moving her in with me, securing Social Security Disability support, and working with my very understanding employer on a

flexible schedule to accommodate multiple doctor's appointments, I knew that I was ultimately facing the choice of either quitting my job to care for her, or putting her in institutional care under Medicaid. I called on the local Area Agency on Aging, funded in part through the Older Americans Act, and they connected me to a number of services that helped me keep my mom at home, where we both wanted her to be, and also allowed me to continue working full time.

For example, three days a week I dropped my mom off at an adult day center where I knew she would be loved, fed, entertained and cared for while I went to work. The local aging agency then referred me to private-pay home care options I could afford and that could fill in gaps when she wasn't at adult day care. They also provided caregiver respite when I desperately needed just a couple of days out of town to recharge. When my mom's needs became too severe to take her to adult day care anymore, the aging agency helped me navigate the complicated world of publicly funded home care options for her through Medicaid, and the local ombudsman office (also funded through OAA) ensured that her application for a Medicaid home and community-based services waiver was fast-tracked through an often cumbersome approval process. Her caregiving needs were so severe that we simply didn't have time to wait for the system to run its normal course and the local aging agency was instrumental in moving things along. I could not have navigated this caregiver role without the assistance of these services funded through the Older Americans Act and delivered by the local aging agency, and there is no doubt in my mind that without them I would have quit my job and left the workforce to care for her, or she would have ended up in institutional care funded by Medicaid.

But my story is just one of millions of stories of how critical federal Older Americans Act (OAA) services are to millions of seniors and caregivers in every community in the country. These essential programs help us, as a country, keep our promise to previous generations and

care for the people who cared for us. I urge you to protect and promote investments in the Older Americans Act.

OAA is the cornerstone of the nation's non-Medicaid home and community-based services system, providing seniors and caregivers supports that they need to age at home and in the community for as long as possible.

There are dozens of programs and services funded by OAA, but here are just a few of the most common to show the range of help that OAA provides:

- in-home care, such as help with bathing and dressing;
- home-delivered meals and congregate meals served in local community or senior centers to prevent malnutrition and social isolation;
- transportation, such as rides to the doctor, grocery store or church;
- information and referral assistance so consumers can find the help they need locally;
- case management for those who need help coordinating their care;
- adult day care to relieve family caregivers;
- legal services to protect seniors from being exploited; and
- support for family caregivers who are doing their part to help loved ones age with dignity and independence.

As you can imagine, these services are in high demand in every community, but they have very limited federal resources. Meanwhile, we are facing an unprecedented demographic shift as the nation's baby boomers age at a pace unseen in history. Every day 10,000 people turn 65. In just the next four years, 15 million people will reach traditional retirement age. By 2030, over 73 million people, or one-fifth of the country's population, will be 65 or older.

For years, funding for Older Americans Act programs that support this growing

population has not even kept pace with annual inflation—let alone the population growth. This rapid erosion of funding coupled with a growing need has made it increasingly difficult, or even impossible for local providers to even maintain existing services. As a result, local waiting lists for many essential services are long and growing longer.

This dire situation only intensifies the need for federal investment, both in the short and long-term, especially considering that these vital discretionary programs help offset future mandatory spending—when seniors are healthier, Medicare saves money; when frail older adults receive in-home services that prevent or delay nursing home admission, Medicaid saves money.

Given OAA's 50-year history of providing flexible, targeted, cost-effective and person-centered care to keep seniors healthy, why would we not invest in these essential programs on the front end to avoid much greater long-term costs among a growing population?

This is why I'm here today, joined by a chorus of national and local aging advocates, urging you, as appropriators, to carry out the promise that your colleagues on both sides of the aisle made last year by reauthorizing OAA, and ensure that OAA programs are protected from brutal funding cuts that could directly prevent seniors from getting the ride to the doctor, the meal, or in my case, the adult day care and caregiver support services they need.

I know you face very tough choices about funding priorities this year. However, cutting OAA services will be a penny-wise, pound-foolish strategy and these cuts will end up costing taxpayers much more money in the long-run, and more importantly will threaten the health and dignity of millions of older Americans.

Specifically, I urge you to support funding for OAA programs that, at a minimum, meets the levels that received bipartisan support in the 2016 reauthorization. I also ask that you focus on restoring funding to critical programs such as OAA Title III B Supportive

Services and the Title III E National Family Caregiver Support Program, which have had little to no relief from sequestration cuts despite recent budget deals.

On behalf of the millions of older Americans and their caregivers in every community across the country, on behalf of the hundreds of local agencies coordinating and delivering services in nearly every community, and on behalf of one daughter caring for her mother, I urge you to protect investments in OAA that are in the best interests of a rapidly aging population and the financial health of the nation as a whole.

Thank you.