January 10, 2014

Dear Senator:

As the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing the interests of Americans age 50 and older and their families, **AARP urges you to reject using a Social Security disability insurance offset to pay for the cost of renewing emergency unemployment insurance benefits.**

AARP has consistently advocated against using permanent reductions in Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit, offset scheduled sequester cuts, or pay for other government spending. While we agree it is important to extend emergency unemployment benefits, and may be especially so to older workers who are disproportionately represented among the long-term unemployed, we remain steadfast in our commitment to protect the Social Security benefits upon which millions of Americans rely daily, and we oppose cutting Social Security benefits to provide an offset for other government programs, even those that are critical.

The Social Security disability (SSDI) and unemployment insurance (UI) programs have been established for different purposes and largely serve different populations. As highlighted in a 2012 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), less than one percent of individuals served by the SSDI and UI programs receive concurrent benefits. At the same time, receiving SSDI and UI concurrently is not illegal, fraudulent, or inconsistent. This has been the long-standing position of the Social Security Administration and of the courts. Individuals who receive concurrent benefits do so because they have significant disabilities that make them eligible for SSDI, and because they have also attempted to maintain a connection to the workforce but work at a low level of earnings and then have lost their job through no fault of their own. Both of these legitimately earned benefits can be a lifeline to workers with disabilities who receive them. We are concerned about the impact that any cuts to these already modest benefits will have on workers with disabilities and their families.

We are equally concerned that by offsetting SSDI benefits with UI earnings, the Senate is permanently changing Social Security policy for the purpose of containing the costs of a temporary emergency unemployment insurance extension. AARP firmly believes that any changes to Social Security, which is off-budget, self-financed by payroll taxes and has run surpluses for most of the last 30 years, must be done separately within the proper context of ensuring the financial security of present and future generations of Americans, and not
for purposes of reducing the federal budget deficit or as a bargaining chip for other government spending.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to call me, or have your staff contact Debbie Chalfie of our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-3723.

Sincerely,

Joyce A. Rogers
Senior Vice President
Government Affairs