July 15, 2019

The Honorable Andy Levin
U.S. House of Representatives
228 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Elise Stefanik
U.S. House of Representatives
318 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Levin and Stefanik:

AARP, on behalf of our nearly 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, is pleased to endorse the Supporting Family Caregivers Act of 2019, which would help encourage and support the use of caregiver assessments under the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP).

Most of us are, have been, or will be a family caregiver or will need help to live independently. Family caregivers are the backbone of America’s care system. An estimated 40 million family caregivers provide a staggering $470 billion annually in unpaid care to their loved ones—ranging from bathing and dressing to managing finances and transportation. According to the study, Home Alone Revisited: Family Caregivers Providing Complex Care, half of family caregivers perform medical and nursing tasks for individuals with challenges in physical, cognitive and behavioral health, often with little preparation or training. Family caregivers also often serve as care coordinators, navigating systems of care and different providers. By supporting family caregivers, we can help people stay at home, helping to delay or prevent more costly nursing home care and unnecessary hospitalizations.

The Supporting Family Caregivers Act would enhance support for caregivers by encouraging the use of caregiver assessments under the National Family Caregiver Support Program and providing technical assistance to support grantees in carrying out the assessments. Understanding the family caregiving situation is a critical step in the process for linking the family caregiver to the most appropriate support services (e.g., counseling, respite care, etc.), as the circumstances of each caregiver are varied. Questions regarding the skills, abilities and knowledge of family caregivers can help to identify the tasks that are most problematic and stressful for the caregiver. This information, in turn, can lead to targeting support services more effectively and efficiently. Better targeting of support services can also help maintain the health and
well-being of the caregiver, sustain their ability to provide care, produce better outcomes for their loved ones and prevent or delay nursing home placement. Assessing the needs of caregivers is also a more person- and family-centered approach.

NFCSP provides grants to states and territories to fund a range of supports that directly address the needs of families in their caregiving role. According to the Westat Outcome Evaluation of the National Family Caregiver Support Program, key among the evaluation’s finding are that NFCSP respite services are effective in reducing caregiver burden and that other caregiver support services—including education and skills training, support groups and counseling—increase caregiver confidence. The evaluation also demonstrates that NFCSP services help the caregiver to continue in their role for longer periods.

The Supporting Family Caregivers Act would build on the successes of NFCSP at a critical time. People age 80 and older are among the most likely to need help to live independently in their homes and communities, and the age 80-plus population is projected to increase by 54 percent from 2019 to 2030. Additionally, over the next decade, family caregivers will likely face greater strains as the number of family caregivers is not expected to keep up with the large number of older adults needing care, underscoring the need to further strengthen the programs that support caregivers.

This bill would take important steps to offer caregivers the opportunity to have their needs assessed when they turn to the National Family Caregiver Support Program for help so they can receive the support services most beneficial to them. We appreciate your bipartisan leadership and are committed to working with you to enhance support for caregivers. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or have your staff contact Nicole Burda on our Government Affairs team at nburda@aarp.org or 202-434-3779.

Sincerely,

David Certner
Legislative Counsel and Legislative Policy Director
Government Affairs