October 25, 2019

Dear Representative:

On behalf of our nearly 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, AARP is pleased to support H.R. 4334, the bipartisan Dignity in Aging Act of 2019, legislation to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). We urge you to pass this legislation that will maintain the critical service and information roles of OAA programs and promote greater responsiveness to the needs of older Americans.

Too often, advancing age and increasing frailty threaten the ability of older Americans to live independently in their own homes and communities. The fear of having to leave family behind and enter a nursing home weighs heavily on the minds of many. According to AARP’s Home and Community Preferences Survey, the vast majority of adults age 50-plus—more than three out of four people—want to remain in their community as long as possible. Giving Americans the support they need to live at home with independence and dignity has always been a bedrock goal of OAA, and it has been remarkably successful.

For many older Americans, the key to being able to stay in their own homes is the dedication and commitment of family caregivers. 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 paying bills and transportation and assisting with medical/nursing tasks. By supporting family caregivers, we can help people stay at home, helping to delay or prevent more costly nursing home care and unnecessary hospitalizations. Therefore, we are pleased the Dignity in Aging Act addresses AARP’s family caregiving priorities, including further strengthening the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) and extending the bipartisan Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregivers Act (P.L. 115-119).

Specifically, the legislation includes H.R. 3782, the bipartisan Supporting Family Caregivers Act sponsored by Representatives Andy Levin and Elise Stefanik. This provision will help make sure that more caregivers can get their needs assessed when they turn to NFCSP for support. Understanding the family caregiving situation is a critical step in the process for linking the family caregiver to the most appropriate support services, as every family’s needs are unique. Assessments of the caregiving situation provide information to help target services more effectively. 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. H.R. 4334 also provides more time for implementation of the RAISE Family Caregivers Act. This will allow the Advisory Council to do its work and find additional meaningful solutions to better support the 40 million family caregivers nationwide.

Importantly, H.R. 4334 also provides increased funding levels for OAA programs. People age 80 and older are among the most likely to need assistance to live independently in their homes and
communities. The population of Americans in this age group is projected to increase by 54 percent from 2019 to 2030. Additionally, over the next decade, the number of family caregivers is not expected to keep up with the large number of older adults needing care, underscoring the need for greater investments in OAA programs. Increased funding levels will assist more older Americans and caregivers, thus helping more older adults remain at home and in better health, avoiding costlier services.

We urge you to vote for the Dignity in Aging Act. Prompt reauthorization of this law will help ensure the sustainability of OAA programs, and as a result, our loved ones can continue to turn to these vital services for their health and economic security as they age. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me or have your staff contact Nicole Burda on our Government Affairs team at nburda@aarp.org.

Sincerely,

Bill Sweeney
Senior Vice President
Government Affairs