



June 21, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health & Human Services
Committee on Appropriations
2365 Rayburn Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health & Human Services
Committee on Appropriation
1036 Longworth Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you prepare for the markup of the Labor, Health & Human Services and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for FY 2023, AARP, on behalf of our nearly 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, would like to express our views with respect to programs that are critical to the well-being of millions of older Americans.

We truly value the additional support for the many programs serving Americans of all ages this Committee has provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. And while some challenges may need to be addressed to ensure continued delivery of vital assistance for years to come, we ask that the Committee continue to make investments in programs that help ensure older Americans can live independently and with dignity as they age. We specifically urge that you consider the following investments for the coming fiscal year.

Social Security Administration Operations (SSA)

As previously indicated in our letter of May 16, 2022, AARP strongly supports the Administration's budget request for the SSA but believes it is still insufficient to help correct long-standing deficiencies in some areas of customer service or alarming trends in others. For too long, SSA has been unable to fulfill its core mission of delivering Social Security services that meet the changing needs of the public. Beneficiaries continue to report significant dissatisfaction over field office closures, hours of operation, phone answer rates, and claims processing times. Over the next decade, about 18 million more people will reach the traditional retirement age and the number of beneficiaries of the three major federal programs SSA administers is expected to increase to more than 69 million in FY 2029. SSA simply cannot improve customer service levels with a growing number of beneficiaries and flat funding year

after year. We strongly urge the Committee to provide no less than \$15.156 billion for regular administrative operations.

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)

AARP respectfully urges the Committee to fully fund the Administration's FY 2023 request of \$494.3 million for the CMS State Survey and Certification Program. The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on long-standing problems in nursing homes and the importance of annual surveys, complaint investigations and oversight to ensure quality of care for all residents in Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing homes. Funding for the program has remained flat for over seven years, while costs and workload have increased. Timely surveys can identify potential quality of care or quality of life issues earlier and help get them addressed sooner to prevent actual or potential harm to residents, including harm that could also increase costs in Medicare and Medicaid.

AARP also supports fully funding the Administration's request on program integrity/anti-fraud efforts. Fraud and abuse cost the Medicare program, its beneficiaries, and taxpayers tens of billions of dollars annually. A balanced effort to combat fraud and abuse is a sound investment in the program's overall health and will help strengthen Medicare's finances while maintaining beneficiaries' access to care.

Administration for Community Living (ACL)

AARP urges the Committee to fully fund the Administration's FY 2023 request for the National Family Caregiver Support Program, Home and Community-Based Supportive Services, and nutrition programs. These cost-effective investments serve the needs of older Americans while deferring or eliminating the need for costly institutionalization.

AARP strongly supports the Administration's FY2023 request of \$14.2 million for the Lifespan Respite Care Program. In addition to the 23.7 hours per week, on average, family caregivers spend providing care, many are also employed full- or part-time. According to *Caregiving in the US 2020*, an AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving research report, 61 percent of caregivers were employed while providing care for their loved ones, with 60 percent of employed caregivers working full-time. Additionally, nearly 1 in 5 family caregivers report high physical strain while 4 in 10 caregivers consider their caregiving situation to be highly stressful. For family caregivers, respite care can provide vital temporary physical and emotional relief from caregiving responsibilities and is one of the most requested caregiver support services. Respite care can extend the time an individual is cared for at home, potentially delaying costly institutional care and saving taxpayer dollars.

Nearly four million people aged 65 and older live in poverty, and more than 5.3 million people age 60 and over struggle with hunger. Research shows that nursing home costs can be substantially reduced by increasing Title III home-delivered meals. States that spend as little as

\$25 more per year per older adult age 65 and older on home-delivered meals could reduce their nursing home costs by one percent; a senior could receive meals for an entire year for what it costs for just one day in the hospital.

AARP urges the Committee to provide the highest possible funding level for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance program. More than 6.1 million poor households rely on LIHEAP to help pay their home heating and cooling bills. LIHEAP plays an essential role for millions of American households who suffer short-term financial difficulties due to illness, job loss, or other unanticipated expenses. LIHEAP effectively and efficiently provides much-needed energy assistance for the country's most vulnerable families; 70 percent of households have at least one member who is elderly or disabled or have a child under the age of six.

AARP greatly appreciates the opportunity to comment on these programs of significant importance to older Americans. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Timothy Gearan of our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-3803.

Sincerely,



Bill Sweeney
Senior Vice President
Government Affairs