



Testimony of Max Richtman  
Chair, Leadership Council of Aging Organizations  
Acting CEO, National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare  
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging  
Hearing on the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act  
May 26, 2011

On behalf of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCOA), I am honored to testify before the Senate Special Committee on Aging to share the LCAO Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization Consensus Document. I have provided a copy of the document with my written testimony.

LCAO is a 66-member coalition of diverse national nonprofit organizations dedicated to preserving and strengthening the well-being of America's older population. We provide a voice for seniors and their families in the ongoing national debate on aging policy.

As the Committee is aware, the OAA expires this September at the end of fiscal year 2011. LCAO has historically played a significant leadership role in past reauthorizations. To support a bipartisan, efficient and effective reauthorization in 2011, last summer the LCAO Community Services Committee initiated the process to reach consensus on a set of recommendations for OAA reauthorization. Individual organizations' ideas and recommendations were presented throughout the fall; from December 2010 through March 2011, the Committee met almost weekly to shape the Consensus Document. The full LCAO enthusiastically endorsed the Document on April 6.

The LCAO OAA Reauthorization Consensus Document contains 98 recommendations that both reinforce key existing priorities in the current statute and seek to address challenges and opportunities brought by the exponential growth in the older adult population. As our colleagues explored potential changes to the OAA over the past several months, it became very clear that the Act continues to work very well for older adults across the country. The Act's core mission, infrastructure and programs remain relevant, effective and very much relied upon by older adults and caregivers. The greatest obstacle the OAA and the Aging Network it supports face in meeting their full potential, however, remains insufficient funding for the priorities established by Congress in past reauthorizations.

We also must acknowledge that the OAA, like other statutes, is a living document that can and must change to address emerging needs and embrace new innovations. It is notable that the OAA is up for reauthorization the same year that the first of the Baby Boomers turn 65 years old. Not only are the numbers of older adults increasing at an historic rate, but this population is

becoming much more diverse. Additionally, as older Americans live longer, they face growing health and economic challenges. All these issues are converging to place additional strain on an Aging Network that is already overtaxed, but eager to expand capacity and enhance planning to meet the demands and seize the opportunities of the aging of the population.

It should be noted that LCAO's recommended improvements do not require major changes to the OAA's core services or eligibility requirements. We continue to prioritize the Act's focus on person- and family-centered care, targeted to those with greatest economic and social need, with local flexibility to serve unique communities and populations. Nevertheless, we do acknowledge, particularly in times of fiscal restraint, that improvements can be made in the efficiency and effectiveness of the OAA in its delivery of core services and how it interacts and coordinates with other federal programs that serve older adults. There are recommendations throughout the Consensus Document that call for improved coordination of services and identification and dissemination of best practices already occurring in local communities to strengthen the Aging Network nationwide.

LCAO also believes it is crucial to strengthen evaluation, and research and demonstration, of aging services. This will not only empower the Aging Network to continue implementing best practices, but also state with authority the degree to which the OAA provides a cost-effective way for older adults to remain in their own homes with health and economic security.

On behalf of LCAO, I applaud the Aging Committee for its leadership in calling attention to the upcoming OAA reauthorization. We urge Congress to continue the tradition of bipartisan and timely reauthorization of this important statute, while providing the funding needed for OAA programs to keep older Americans independent and productive. OAA programs – such as in-home assistance, home-delivered and congregate meals, and respite for family caregivers – benefit individuals and their families and save federal and state government resources from being spent on otherwise unnecessary care in hospitals and nursing homes (institutional care).

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the 66 members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations, and I welcome your questions and comments.