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PENNSYLVANIA

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3805

April 22, 2020

The Honorable Lance Robertson
Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging
Administration for Community Living
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator Robertson:

I have held a series of tele-roundtable discussions with representatives from Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and direct service providers across Pennsylvania regarding the pandemic's impact on the state's aging network. What I have heard from AAAs representing nearly every one of the 67 counties in the state demonstrates that urban and rural AAAs are rising to the challenge to meet the growing demands created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a crisis that requires innovative solutions and AAAs need guidance about different strategies to help meet the needs of their communities. I write to share with you some of the best practices that I heard about during these conversations and to urge you to disseminate innovative approaches that the aging network has implemented to respond to the current pandemic to AAAs across the country.

It is clear that COVID-19 poses a threat to older adults and people with disabilities. According to a recent analysis, deaths linked to the virus were more pronounced among older adults, reaching as high as almost 15 percent among those ages 80 and older.¹ In order to reduce their risk of exposure to the virus, older adults and people with disabilities are being asked to stay home, and as such, increasingly find themselves dependent upon supports, including meal delivery and home and community-based services. AAAs and local service providers are essential to meet the growing need for home and community-based services to help people remain safely in their homes, though face unprecedented barriers to doing so.

Providers across Pennsylvania are finding innovative ways to continue to serve seniors in their home in this difficult time. One AAA recognized the struggle that older adults and people with disabilities faced accessing nutritious foods, they then decided to partner with a local transportation company to implement grocery delivery for the community. Another AAA identified the demand for information about local resources and accurate information about COVID-19 in their communities. In response, the AAA developed a weekly newsletter to

¹ W. Zunyou, J. McGoogan, "Characteristics of and Important Lessons From the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID- 19) Outbreak in China: Summary of a Report of 72 314 Cases From the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention" *JAMA* (February 24, 2020) <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2762130>.

support resource navigation and to ensure that residents have access to evidence informed information about COVID-19. The newsletter is distributed through the local news, on Facebook, posted on the AAA's website, and accompanies every home delivered meal. I am proud of what Pennsylvania AAAs are doing to meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities in the community.

The leaders in our aging network have a lot to share with their counterparts across the country, and I suspect they would be able to learn from others. I urge ACL to solicit innovative ideas from AAAs and local service providers that address the growing need for home and community-based services and disseminate those ideas through ACL's COVID-19 information page. We must do everything in our power to ensure that the aging network has the resources and tools to serve our most at risk populations. I look forward to working with ACL to guarantee that our communities are equipped with the information necessary to meet the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Casey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bob" and last name "Casey" clearly distinguishable.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator