

May 17, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, we write to thank you for including in the fiscal year (FY) 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act critical funding, and in many cases, needed increases for programs that support the health and economic security of older people. We request that you include robust funding for federal programs that assist older Americans in the (FY) 2019 appropriations bills.

The Senate Aging Committee has undertaken a number of efforts to advance the well-being and financial security of older Americans. This Congress, the Committee is focused on several priority areas, including preventing financial exploitation and abuse of older Americans, promoting medical research and innovation, advancing retirement security, and improving access to services in rural areas.

Our Committee holds numerous hearings to examine the array of manipulative crimes targeting our nation’s seniors. With financial scams, too often criminals rob older Americans of their hard-earned savings, as well as their sense of security. Combatting the exploitation of seniors requires the education and outreach of the aging network, which operates in communities across America through the Older Americans Act. This network is supported by the efforts of investigators at agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Communications Commission, as well as work carried out by the Government Accountability Office. Adequate funding for all three of these agencies and networks are necessary to limit senior financial exploitation. In addition, robust funding for the Elder Justice Act and Adult Protective Services is essential to prevent abuse in guardianship arrangements and to educate seniors on managing their finances, health and well-being.

The Aging Committee also works to highlight the importance of investments in biomedical research and innovative technologies. Our annual hearing on Alzheimer’s disease, for example, demonstrates the strong bipartisan interest in maintaining our nation’s leadership in biomedical research and in workforce development, such as for dementia care training. We strongly support continuing the bipartisan work of the Senate to increase funding for the National Institutes of Health, including for Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias. These investments in research and training programs are critical across federal agencies to meet the needs of older Americans and their families.

The long-term retirement security of older Americans is another key area of focus for the Aging Committee. As the Baby Boomer generation moves into retirement, ensuring individuals and families are in receipt of their earned Social Security and Medicare benefits is crucial. To that end, sufficient administrative funding is paramount to maintaining and improving the Social Security Administration's services, such as field office operations. Also critical, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program helps individuals and families make informed choices about their Medicare coverage and requires continued robust support. Helping older Americans age in place is another important component of promoting seniors' retirement security and financial well-being. Through the Assistive Technology Act, state programs provide assistive technologies to help older Americans maintain their independence and stay in their communities as they age.

We hear firsthand that many older Americans are experiencing financial hardship because they are spending their retirement years caring for loved ones including spouses, relatives or children. Older Americans Act programs that support caregivers allow families to maintain economic security while caring for a loved one. The struggles of these caregivers also underscore the importance of sufficient funding for programs such as the Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to assist military families caring for veterans with disabilities; the Kinship Navigator Program to help grandparents who are taking on primary caregiving duties for their grandchildren; and the RAISE Family Caregivers Act to develop a national strategy to support family caregivers. Millions of caregivers depend on the complete funding of these programs to help their families.

Finally, the Committee is keenly aware of the challenges older Americans in rural areas face in maintaining their independence when support services may be less readily accessible. Given this, federal programs that support housing, energy assistance, nutrition, employment assistance, and transportation needs continue to be in high demand. Programs that provide this assistance, such as Meals on Wheels, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program are some of the only programs that specifically target older Americans needs in rural areas. These programs are supplemented by other key services, such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program, which add another measure of food security for seniors living on low incomes. We look forward to working with you to ensure that these and other programs reaching rural seniors in need are fully funded.

We thank you for your past support of federal programs that meet the needs of older Americans and we look forward to your continued support in (FY) 2019. These investments are necessary to meet the challenges of our aging population, and to turn those challenges into opportunities that reshape our future.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
Chairman



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member

Cc: The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies; Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies; Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable James Lankford, Chairman, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government; Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Christopher Coons, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government; Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; Committee on Appropriations