

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

February 6, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairman
Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Casey
Ranking Member
Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Alexander and Collins and Ranking Members Murray and Casey:

Justice in Aging writes in strong support for the Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020. Justice in Aging is a national organization that fights senior poverty through law by securing access to affordable health care, economic security, and the courts for older adults with limited resources. We focus our efforts primarily on fighting for people who have been marginalized and excluded from justice, such as women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and people with limited English proficiency. Since our founding over 45 years ago, we have been a key member of the legal services community and an essential partner within the broader aging community.

Older adults need legal assistance to achieve justice in aging. The Older Americans Act (OAA) provides essential support to legal services programs and the aging network. OAA legal services are particularly critical for the over seven million older adults currently living in poverty. The growing number of poor seniors tracks the nation's overall demographic shift: in the next decade, one in five people will be a senior,¹ and, if current retirement trends continue, over twenty-five million older adults will live in poverty by 2050.²

Older adults have a wide array of legal needs, including health care, long term services and supports (LTSS), elder abuse protection and prevention, housing, income security, and consumer issues. Unfortunately, current legal funding support is not able to meet the growing

¹ US Census Bureau, "Older People Projected to Outnumber Children for First Time in US History," (2018), available at: [census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html).

² Teresa Ghilarducci, "By 2050, There Could be as Many as 25 Million Poor Elderly Americans," (2015), available at: theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/12/elderly-poverty-america/422235.

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need. A recent Justice Gap report³ found that older adults are receiving inadequate or no professional legal help for an estimated 87% of all their problems. The bipartisan passage of the Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020 will be an important step toward bridging this gap and meeting older adults' legal needs.

The OAA is essential to developing, coordinating, and delivering home and community-based services that help older adults age with independence and dignity in their homes and communities. The Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020 preserves the numerous ways in which the OAA works so successfully at the federal, state, and local levels, on behalf of the older adults and caregivers. Importantly, the legislation recognizes the critical need for necessary investments in the Older Americans Act by increasing authorization levels over the next five years. We strongly support these investments and commend your leadership in and commitment to strengthening the Older Americans Act.

Thank you for your consideration. I can be reached at JGoldberg@justiceinaging.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Goldberg
Deputy Director

cc:

Chairman Michael Enzi and Ranking Member Bernie Sanders
Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health and Retirement Security

Chairman Bobby Scott and Ranking Member Virginia Foxx
House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairwoman Suzanne Bonamici and Ranking Member James Comer
House Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services

³ The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans. Prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago for Legal Services Corporation. Washington, DC.