



Sen. Kyrsten Sinema  
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Dear Sen. Sinema:

We appreciate your staff taking the time to meet last week with Arizona LeadingAge and our nonprofit provider members who serve older Arizonians. We are grateful for your leadership on issues facing older adults and the providers who serve them. As the deadline to finalize reconciliation legislation nears and news reports suggest hesitance over infrastructure investments, we want to reiterate the urgency of investments in aging services.

Older Arizonians and their families are facing an unprecedented crisis as our system of supports and services nears a dangerous breaking point. The needs in our state are pressing. Consider:

- Arizona's 65+ population is among the fastest growing in the United States, growing by [52% between 2009-2019](#). And more than half of all Americans are projected to need long-term services and supports at some point after turning 65.
- [Half of the homeless population](#) in Arizona is over the age of 50. Of those homeless people who died in the Phoenix area in the first nine months of last year, [nearly 40%](#) were over 55.
- In the next five years, Arizona is forecast to need at least [41,000 more home health care workers](#) to meet rising demand.
- In Arizona, the average annual wage for home health and personal care aides is [\\$26,050](#), and the average annual entry-level nursing and in-home care wage: [\\$35,110](#). For comparison, the average wage for many fast-food cashiers in Arizona is [\\$36,504](#).

The billions of dollars required to ensure older adults and their families get the care and housing they need are not just numbers. These funds will impact the lives of millions of older Americans who need help to eat and bathe and take their medicine, or who too often die on waiting lists for affordable housing that last for years.

As we discussed, we are hearing from front-line providers about the growing obstacles to their efforts to help older Arizonians:

- Tom Egan, President and CEO of Phoenix-based [FSL \(Foundation for Senior Living\)](#), has described the growth in homelessness among older adults and their need for affordable housing. “Every one of FSL’s 25 apartment complexes has 300 or 400 people on the waiting lists, and the wait time is three to five years. We’ve seen estimates that the reconciliation bill money would allow Arizona to nearly quadruple the number of units built each year. Keep that up for several years, and it will make a big difference.”
- Donna Taylor, chief operating officer of Lifestream Senior Living in Youngtown, noted at the meeting with your staff that without support on Medicaid reimbursement and funds to recruit and train staff, long term care providers are facing hard choices as staffing shortages worsen. “We’ve closed one of our two skilled nursing facilities because of staffing shortages. It was heartbreaking. Most of our workers stayed with us through the really tough times last year. But this is hard; our people are tired. We’re seeing staff leave now. And they are able to do it; they’ve got options. The older adults who need care don’t leave, they don’t have that option. As a Medicaid long-term care provider, we fill in a gap for many families who can’t care for their loved ones at home, or for older adults without families. If it were not for organizations like ours, who will take care of these residents?”
- Tom Egan elaborates on the staff shortage crisis: “Much like our industry partners, FSL struggles with recruitment and retention of our direct care workforce, which impacts our ability to serve the community. The majority of this work is tied to government rates, and that makes it difficult to compete with hotels, restaurants and other entry-level employer’s who are raising wages at a rapid pace.”

Senator Sinema, thank you for being a leader in supporting older adults. Please do not miss this opportunity to see that an investment of historical proportions is made in our aging services infrastructure. So many older Arizonans need this support to eat, bathe, and take their medicine, or to avoid lingering on affordable housing waiting lists that last years. We look forward to working with you and ensuring this critical funding crosses the finish line.

Respectfully,



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