



October 8, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Assistant Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Majority Whip
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Democratic Policy Committee Chair
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Majority Whip Durbin, Assistant Leader Murray, and DPC Chair Stabenow,

On behalf of our aging services provider members and the older adults they serve, I would like to reiterate LeadingAge's key priorities in the Build Back Better Act. We understand that programs are at risk of being ripped from the Build Back Better Act. Given the great and growing need for these programs, now is precisely the wrong time to remove key programs and supports for older adults from the package.

Thank you for your leadership to make historic, structural investments for older adults and aging services providers in the Build Back Better reconciliation legislation. As the pieces of the proposal have emerged from individual House committees, we would like to highlight the investments we believe to be particularly impactful to meet the critical and pressing needs facing older adults.

In addition to affordable senior housing and home and community-based services (HCBS), several of the provisions would respond to the workforce crisis, the challenges of which were reflected in a recent LeadingAge member survey. An overwhelming percentage of respondents reported they need to hire 50% more staff to become fully staffed; they are filling vacant positions with temporary or agency staff (57%); and 75% of the respondents shared "seeking better pay" as a reason staff members are leaving their organization.

The following provisions are critical to older adults and aging services organizations, by House committee:

Committee on Energy and Commerce:

- Allocating at least \$190 billion to expand HCBS services for older adults and people with disabilities. This allocation would also strengthen the direct care workforce recruitment and retention opportunities by improving provider payment rates and giving states the resources to ensure the rate increases are passed through to workers' wages.

Committee on Financial Services:

- \$2.4 billion for new Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly. These funds will build 35,564 homes with Service Coordinators, ensuring more very low income older adults will have the affordable housing and access to services they need. This month, HUD reported a 16% increase between 2017 and 2019 of

“worst case housing needs” among very low income older adults, precisely the population served by the Section 202 program whose residents have average annual incomes of \$14,400. No other household type experienced such an increase of worst case housing needs, which the report showed has increased 82% among older adults between 2009 and 2019. The new technical assistance center within this account will also help states better align housing and services to greatly expand the ability of low income older adults to age in community. As Senator Joe Manchin said in a September 22, 2021 announcement of a new Section 202 grant award for a West Virginia nonprofit, “Far too many West Virginians are facing housing instability and experiencing homelessness, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made this dire and heartbreaking issue worse. This [Section 202 grant award] funding will support West Virginia organizations and housing facilities that provide affordable housing for low income West Virginia seniors across the state. I will continue to fight for funding to ensure every West Virginian has a roof over their head, regardless of their situation.” The need for affordable housing is severe in West Virginia, as it is for the rest of the nation.

Committee on Ways and Means:

- Fixing future and addressing current Right of First Refusal issues in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, a problem that put older adults’ affordable homes at risk, robbed rightful nonprofit owners of affordable senior housing of their buildings and cost millions in unnecessary litigation.
- Addressing the staff shortages in long-term facilities by allocating \$1.2 billion for Nursing Home Worker Training Grants, to be used for long-term care workforce recruitment, wage subsidies, paid leave and childcare.
- Allocating \$425 million to expand the Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) Program, to provide training and supportive services to low income individuals for occupations in the health care field that experience labor shortages or, are in high demand. These grant awards will also allow skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) and nonprofit organizations to be eligible grantees.
- Improving the accuracy and reliability of the data collected in SNFs by requiring a study on the appropriateness of minimum staff to resident ratios of registered nurses and recommendations for minimum staffing ratios for certified nursing assistants and nurses.

Committee on Education and Labor:

- Investing in the direct care workforce by providing \$1.48 billion to support grants to recruit, retain, and implement models and strategies to make the field more attractive and improve wages.
- Funding for the aging services network and infrastructure by providing \$1.2 billion for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs.
- Reauthorizing the Registered Apprenticeships Program, at \$5 billion funding level, with 50 percent of funds reserved for programs serving high numbers of individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, or nontraditional apprenticeship populations, and for expanding youth apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships.

LeadingAge represents more than 5,000 nonprofit aging services providers, including affordable senior housing providers and other mission-minded organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Alongside our members

and 38 state partners, we use applied research, advocacy, education, and community-building to make America a better place to grow old. Our membership encompasses the continuum of services for people as they age.

We are dismayed the Build Back Better Act could be shrunk dramatically and strongly urge you not to impose any such cuts on the programs older adults need the most.

Older adults and aging services providers are desperate for these investments and are deeply grateful for your leadership to secure them. LeadingAge stands ready to support the funding levels reflected in the committees' bill through enactment, which cannot come soon enough.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smith Sloan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K" and "S".

Katie Smith Sloan
President and CEO