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The Honorable Senator Baldwin
United States Senate
Washington, DC, 20510

December 2, 2024

Re: 2024 Older Americans Act Reauthorization

Dear Senator Baldwin,

On behalf of the Milwaukee County Area Agency on Aging, we are writing to urge you to support advancing the bipartisan Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (S.4776), which we expect to be considered by the Senate early this month.

As the designated Area Agency on Aging, the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging actively solicits feedback from older adults in the community through our Advisory Council and Advocacy Committee and works in collaboration with our Aging Unit to deliver high-quality programs and services to older adults. As one of only three Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in the State of Wisconsin, we represent more than 190,000 older adults, which is nearly 13 percent of the state's entire aging population. We also disproportionately serve adults of color in Wisconsin. Whereas only 3 percent of older adults in Wisconsin are Black, 18 percent in Milwaukee County are Black. The same holds true for Latino older adults. Finally, it's important to note that 13 percent of older adults in Milwaukee County live in poverty, compared to 8 percent for older adults in the state overall.

With our programs and services, we seek to truly reach those in greatest social and economic need to meet the intended spirit of the Older Americans Act.

We have several priorities for this reauthorization process and want to highlight the following:

- **Authorization Levels**—our highest priority is ensuring that authorization levels for each of the title areas of the Act are as high as possible. As we know, the aging population continues to rapidly grow and the costs of delivering programs and services increases each year. Instead of requiring programs to be more selective or providing lower quality services due to stagnant funding, we encourage Congress to recommend funding levels that will allow the aging

network to deliver high-quality service to all older adults in social and economic.

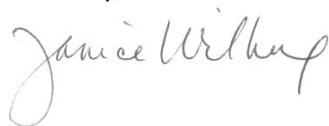
- **Contracting Provisions**—we are also supportive of clarification provided in the draft that creates pathways for AAAs to contract with entities to offer services to more older adults with non-OAA funds in a flexible and nimble manner, while also ensuring that the core principles of the OAA are being met by prioritizing OAA-funded activities and those clients in greatest social and economic need. The ability of AAAs to seek outside and varied funding streams is a testament to the excellent work done by agencies to create as many options as possible to age at home, promote health and wellness, support caregivers, and deliver the mandate of the OAA.
- **Nutrition**—increased flexibility for grab-and-go meals and other innovative nutrition service delivery methods as outlined in the new OAA regulations is another strong priority of ours in this reauthorization process. The continued flexibility in this category, with the discretion provided to AAAs, is critical in responding to emergencies.
- **Title III D Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Programs**—we encourage updates in the Title III D program area to include evidence-informed practices as appropriate use of spending. Expanding the programs offered under this title area to include evidence-informed practices will help AAAs meet the needs of broader and more diverse populations. The higher cost of evidence-based programs—due to ensuring fidelity to the proven method—makes it extremely difficult for AAAs with either a small allocation or a widely dispersed service population to establish a successful program that reaches older adults who could greatly benefit from these interventions.

Most importantly, to best support older adults, it is imperative that funding authorization levels meet the needs of the current and future aging population and the economic realities we face as agencies. It is crucial that we be provided the support necessary to carry out the programs and services in the Older Americans Act successfully and effectively. We appreciate the significant amount of work that has gone into drafting this bill, including the numerous opportunities for the public and experts in the field to provide input.

The bipartisan Senate bill, amended with the House’s input, includes critical updates to the law that help agencies like ours better serve older adults and their family caregivers. Because the Act expired in September, it’s imperative that Congress act quickly this year to ensure the continued health and well-being of the 11 million older adults and family caregivers who receive OAA services in communities across the country.

We look forward to our continued partnership and please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,



Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.
Chair

Milwaukee County Commission on Aging



Brian Peters
Legislative Advocacy Officer

Milwaukee County Commission on Aging