



February 18, 2010

***Prepared Remarks to at Dallas Listening Forum on the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act
On behalf of the National Association of State Units on Aging***

Good afternoon. My name is Martha Roherty and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of the National Association of State Units on Aging. The members of NASUA are the nation's 56 officially designated state and territorial agencies on aging, often referred to as State Units on Aging. NASUA's mission is to design, improve, and sustain state systems delivering home and community based services and supports for the elderly and individuals with disabilities.

We are delighted to be able to participate in this important forum and look forward to the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. We are providing this supporting testimony to provide a state context for the decisions that need to be made. While we are extremely proud of the outstanding long-term services and support foundation that we have helped to build, the current economic crisis continues to force many state aging directors to grapple with difficult decisions on budget cuts, reductions in services, and ultimately may threaten our ability to continue.

The Older Americans Act was originally enacted and subsequently amended in response to the community, social and nutritional needs of seniors. The economic downturn has gravely impacted states ability to provide many of these services, with nearly 30 percent of states cutting OAA programs in response to decreased funding.

As state agencies operate with decreased funding, some are unable to meet federal match requirements to acquire needed funds. For FY09, 10 percent of states had difficulty meeting the OAA match requirements, and an additional 25 percent of states were only able to meet the requirements by making cuts to state funded only programs and redirecting these funds to the OAA match. Roughly the same percentages of states anticipate difficulties and fund redirection in meeting the match requirements during FY10.

Ironically, the economic downturn has highlighted the importance of the OAA to consumers. It is frequently during times of economic turmoil that state funded services are most needed, and, tragically, also the least accessible. While the significance of OAA programs and services is difficult to illustrate, it is not impossible. For example, in this uncertain financial landscape, one constant is the steady increase in service requests for OAA programs: nearly 80 percent of states are seeing increased requests for home delivered meals, and 50 percent report an uptick in congregate meal requests; over 70 percent of states are experiencing increased demand for transportation and personal care services, and only 5 percent of states are not receiving increased service requests. Thus, one byproduct of the economic crisis is the quantifiable value consumers continue to place on OAA services, as shown through seniors' continued reliance on, and demand for, these programs.

Nearly 75 percent of states report state aging budget reductions in both FY10 and FY11, and 61 percent plan to reduce funding for direct services to mitigate these budget cuts. The economic crisis has meant that states are unable to finance programs addressing the needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities such as homemaker and personal care services, with nearly 60 percent of states maintaining wait lists for these services. Of the states that maintain waiting lists 85 percent anticipate these lists will increase over the next year.

Consumers are increasingly affected by the continuing budget cuts, as states are finding it difficult to operate at the service levels required to meet the need generated by the increase in service requests. Compounding the problems resulting from this disconnect, is that as the economy worsens, the requests for services continue to grow in most program areas. Other areas where demand increased between our last two quarterly surveys included: requests for adult day care, homemaker services, and personal care services.

States were asked to estimate the increased requests for services in percentage terms; five percent of the states indicated that the requests for services were increased by between 26 and 50 percent, and 40 percent of the states indicated that the requests for services had increased between 11 and 25 percent. One promising trend however, is that many state unit directors are using this crisis as an opportunity to push for the further development of home and community based services. We continue to see a steady and growing stream of states reporting that developing sustainable home and community based services is more of a priority for states because of, and not in spite of, the economic climate. This priority demonstrates the commitment of NASUA members to serve individuals in their homes and communities which can provide a higher quality of life for seniors and individuals with disabilities while at the same time proving cost effective.

Assistant Secretary Greenlee, NASUA members stand ready to support you in your efforts to continue to build a more robust network. We commend your efforts to provide the network with additional resources in the FY11 federal budget proposal and we hope that you will continue to support the states in their efforts to maintain and build a foundation of home and community based services and supports.

For more information:

National Association of State Units on Aging
1201 15th Street, NW
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
202-898-2578
www.nasua.org