

US Administration of Aging Listening  
Forum on the Reauthorization of the  
Older Americans Act  
Alexandria, Virginia  
February 25, 2010

Statement of the New York  
State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA)



Presented by

Laurie Pferr  
Executive Deputy Director

AOA Listening Session – Alexandria, Virginia  
February 25, 2010

Thank you Madame Secretary for holding this listening session and allowing me the opportunity to provide input as you formulate the Administration on Aging's recommendations to the President related to the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA). My name is Laurie Pferr, Executive Deputy Director of the New York State Office for the Aging, and I am representing Director Michael J. Burgess today. Director Burgess will be submitting follow-up written recommendations for your consideration in a few weeks.

This testimony will focus on six broad areas that we believe need to be strengthened and institutionalized within the Act and funded. Although funding for the Act is a separate process, the issues pertaining to reauthorization of the OAA and funding are intertwined. However, first I wish to provide some context in terms of New York State (NYS). While NYS is frequently viewed as being an urban state because of New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers, the State is extraordinarily rural and also suburban. Forty-three of New York State's sixty-two counties are designated by statute as being rural. There are over 3.5 million older New Yorkers. The challenges and opportunities are many and vary based on geography, population and income distribution.

The Older Americans Act reauthorization comes at a particularly critical juncture for meeting the needs of an aging population. There are several generations comprised within the sixty plus cohort. Over the next five years, the "baby boom" generation, as well as an increasingly ethnically diverse population, will be swelling the ranks of the older population. The aging services community will need to serve these multiple and diverse generations with a myriad of services and strategies. Simultaneously, tremendous opportunities exist to utilize older adults in the workforce and as volunteers. Since these remarks are primarily focused on needs, I will just mention that harnessing the opportunities through employment or re-employment of older adults as well their civic engagement in their communities can significantly support the goals of the Older Americans Act.

On behalf of Director Burgess, I will now turn to the six areas we ask be considered in reauthorization of the Act.

- I. Increase core funding for Older Americans Act in order to adequately expand the infrastructure of cost-effective non-medical home and community-based services to help older adults remain in their communities. The OAA plays a critical role in communities to deliver services to help older adults age in place, support caregivers, provide legal

services and test new approaches to care. In order to ensure that older adults can maintain their independence and prevent higher cost care in hospitals and nursing homes, investments must be made in infrastructure, both in terms of service dollars and incentives to increase the availability of trained workers.

As part of core services, NYSOFA would like to see statutory language added to the Act and the provision of demonstration dollars to states to provide seed funding to local communities to develop livable community plans. The seed funding would help to organize a variety of local stakeholders to understand the demographics of their communities, develop a plan that will address the needs of older adults, and utilize older adults as part of the solution to local problems. Livable community planning grants should be used for either the development of a community based plan or implementing successful aging in place initiatives that support aging in the community.

- II.** The Aging and Disability and Resource Center (ADRC) and Evidence Based Programming (EBI) demonstration programs need to be fully embedded in the OAA and aging network by strengthening language and providing annual appropriations to all States through the State Units on Aging. Further, ADRC and EBI programming needs to be embedded in the national agenda that focuses efforts on prevention and wellness. The demonstrations have been effective in seeding these initiatives. However, in order to effectuate national and state systems change and sustain these changes, federal leadership and funding is key in order to prevent the loss of gains achieved in recent years, particularly in these times of shrinking state and local resources.

In terms of ADRCs, the following objectives are working (1) creating consumer friendly, seamless access to information, assistance and services regardless of funding source and (2) coordinating aging, disability, Medicaid and other systems to utilize resources more effectively and intervene earlier. However, there does need to be recognition that the successful work of the ADRCs is staff intensive. Creating a seamless service system does not reduce the need for funding to support the work of staff as they provide information, assistance, options counseling and other functions. There is need for federal support to embed ADRCs across all states rather than in pockets.

Additionally, we recommend amending the OAA to establish clear statutory authority for State Units on Aging and AAAs to work in partnership with a variety of partners, including health, mental health and transportation, which are vital to successful coordination.

- III.** Transportation continues to be a top priority with insufficient funding to address the unique needs of urban, rural and suburban areas. The aging network provides

quality services that help older adults maintain their independence, but if the older adult is unable to access programs, utilize transportation to be engaged in community life and reduce social isolation, shop for groceries or get to medical appointments, their quality of life and their health status deteriorates. Adequately funding transportation is paramount to the success of the older adult aging in the community and to service providers. We also hope that AoA will be at the table for the reauthorization of SAFETY-LU as a means to address critical transportation needs of older adults. In addition to this, we also support innovative programs like the Independent Transportation Network (ITN) model out of the state of Maine that focuses on a community solution to transportation, is a public-private partnership, is not reliant on limited public transportation, and offers transportation access on a 24/7 basis.

- IV.** There is tremendous need for assistance from AoA in developing an operational web-based data reporting and analysis system tying local, state and federal reporting together in order to effectively measure program and performance outcomes. The development of a data collection and reporting system employing current technologies should be supported, e.g. Web-based client and provider data systems for local and State Units on Aging.

Currently, a variety of computerized systems are used by those administering programs authorized under OAA. Licensing and training for all providers are costly to implement system-wide. Those providers who do not use the same system may not be able to provide complete and consistent client and service data. To achieve and improve reporting, Web-based systems should be used at all levels in the administration of OAA programs. The benefits of such Web-based reporting systems are:

- Timeliness in reporting would be increased
- Cost savings in licensing and training
- Gaps in reported data would be minimized (Missing Data)
- Possible reduction or elimination of duplicative tasks
- Monitoring and evaluation of programs and service delivery would be enhanced
- Custom reports for administrative and other needs could be developed with less effort
- Greater coordination would be achievable for various programs and service delivery

- V.** Legal services are a critical component of Elder Rights and Justice, but these have not been given the same attention as other core services and have not been adequately funded. Older adults are in need of legal services and these should be provided. Providing access to legal services for older adults is a critical need. Landlord-tenant and other housing related issues, financial exploitation and scams, as well as

elder abuse are just some of the areas that require competent legal services. Economic distress coupled with major advancements in technology has created a “perfect storm.” Older adults are increasingly susceptible to a myriad of scams and abuse, with financial exploitation being the fastest growing form of elder abuse.

Investment needs to be made in support of elder abuse mitigation and legal services. This investment should be a prominent part of the Older Americans Act.

**VI.** Staff training is a critical on-going need. Other human services systems emphasize and receive federal funding for staff training. However, this is not the case for delivery of aging services outside the health system. Further, if we are to succeed in changing the system paradigm to be truly individually centered and achieve real consumer choice, then staff training is required in the new paradigm. Since its inception, the aging network has focused on the individual, valued consumer choice, and has sought to maximize the individual’s strengths and informal supports. However, attaining an individual centered system is more than assessing needs and providing options; it is working with an individual to ascertain their goals and objectives and working toward that end. This is a different approach and a paradigm shift for which staff need to be trained in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

Again, thank you Assistant Secretary Greenlee for convening this listening session and for the opportunity to present these remarks.