



President
George J. Kourpias

Secretary-Treasurer
Ruben Burks

**Testimony of
George J. Kourpias, President
Alliance for Retired Americans
Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act**

**Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
February 14, 2006**

Good afternoon Senators. I am George Kourpias, President of the Alliance for Retired Americans. We are a nationwide, grassroots organization that advocates on behalf of older Americans. The Alliance represents more than 3 million retired workers, and our mission is to support public policy that protects the health and economic security of this country's senior citizens.

We teach seniors they can – and should - make a difference in their lives through activism. And it is this activism that we harness to help preserve and protect that which makes a difference in the lives of older Americans.

I am here today to say that the Older Americans Act is a perfect example of something that has made an enormously positive difference in the lives of millions of seniors. Designed to promote the dignity and independence of older people, this landmark law has resulted in the creation of a broad range of indispensable, some would say life saving, services for older adults and their caregivers.

The Alliance does not receive funding, nor do we administer programs, through the Older Americans Act. Many of our members receive the benefits of this law in their everyday lives. And many of our members volunteer in Older Americans Act programs as well.

Thanks to the Older Americans Act, American seniors can today live independent and dignified lives as members of their communities for as long as possible. I hear time and time again what a difference the programs made possible by the Older Americans Act have made in the lives of our Alliance members.

Food arrives with a knock at the door from the "Meals on Wheels" programs. Older Americans Act transportation programs provide visits to the doctors or prescription pick-ups at pharmacies. Ombudsman programs for long term care provide the peace and comfort that family members need when a loved one is in a long term care facility.

This past December, delegates to the White House Conference on Aging, which several dozen Alliance members attended as delegates, voted as their number one resolution that the Older Americans Act be reauthorized within the first six months following the Conference.



But what the Older Americans Act makes possible is more than just health and supportive services. It is, for millions of American seniors, the very reason they can continue to live their independent lifestyles. It allows them to remain part of their communities.

Without the programs funded by the Older Americans Act, far too many elderly citizens would have little choice but to pack up their homes and lives and move to hospitals or nursing homes. Programs and services funded by the Older Americans Act are not only lifesavers for seniors, but they save the federal government and taxpayers the high cost of institutional care. This cost savings is destined to deliver an even better return in the not too distant future. Home and community-based support services will become even more essential as the baby boomers start to age.

The Older Americans Act also supports the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which provides part-time jobs to 100,000 of the most needy seniors each year. Participants in this program work directly for thousands of community and faith-based organizations and government agencies. According to the United States Department of Labor, 70% of these agencies reported that they would not have been able to provide the same level of services without SCSEP. Last year alone, SCSEP participants provided these agencies close to 46 million hours of paid community service. This cost-effective program needs to be continued without any major changes.

Also, the number of older adults in poverty and at risk will increase significantly, according to the Census. By 2008 there will be 6.7 million persons aged 55 or over below poverty, a 22% increase from 5.5 million in 2000; by 2015, this number will increase to 9 million low income older Americans. Clearly the need for SCSEP is growing.

Just last month there was great fan fare when the first of the 77 million baby boomers turned 60. This seismic increase in the aging population will have a direct and dramatic impact on every community, county, city, and state in this country for decades to come. Everything from transportation to health, from recreation to workforce development and housing will be impacted.

What this should be telling us today is that NOW is the time to plan for a dramatic expansion in adequate health and support services. We should NOT be debating cutting or curtailing these essential programs. The reauthorization of the Older Americans Act provides Congress the opportunity to do what is right for today's aging population as well for tomorrow's "new seniors."

The baby boomers are real, but we cannot ignore the fact that the fastest growing segment of our population today is people over 85. Congress must provide for adequate funding to keep seniors independent and productive. And it must ensure that the necessary system of services is in place to meet both current and future needs.

I have seen what programs created by the Older Americans Act do to improve the quality of living for today's older Americans. And it is my hope that as Congress debates measures designed to reduce the deficit, it resists the temptation to cut or eliminate programs that help millions of older Americans

The Older Americans Act created vital programs and services that millions of Americans count on daily to survive. It deserves - and the Alliance for Retired Americans supports - a prompt reauthorization.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before the committee today.