

Statement for HELP Committee Markup

Wednesday, July 31 at 10AM in 562 Dirksen

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will come to order.

This morning we will be considering three bipartisan bills. We're going to debate each bill and then stack all votes at the end.

Let me start off by thanking each of the bill sponsors for working on these important policies and to all the staff for working together to prepare these bills for our markup today.

The first bill that we will consider is **S. 4776, legislation to reauthorize, expand and improve the Older Americans Act**, which I have introduced with Ranking Member Cassidy and that is co-sponsored by Senators Casey, Collins, Kaine, Mullin, and Markey.

This legislation has been endorsed by the AARP, Meals on Wheels America, Elder Justice and the

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs – among many other groups.

I ask Unanimous Consent to include all of these support letters in the record.

This legislation begins to pay attention to the urgent unmet needs of millions of seniors in America and what we should do as a society to reduce the senior poverty rate, to reduce hunger, and to improve the health and well-being of some of the most vulnerable people in our country.

Specifically, this legislation would authorize an increase in Older Americans Act funding from \$2.3 billion this year to \$2.76 billion in Fiscal Year 2025 – a 20% increase in funding compared to last year - \$450 million more in funding.

Over the next 5 years, this legislation would authorize the Appropriations Committee to spend 44% more on the Older Americans Act than it

currently does – taking funding levels from \$2.3 billion in 2024 to \$3.3 billion in 2029 – for a total of \$15 billion.

When we talk about the unmet needs of our nation's seniors this is what we are talking about:

In America today, 12 million seniors are dealing with food insecurity and are worried about not having enough food to eat.

Nearly a quarter of our nation's seniors are considered to be socially isolated and more than one out of every four seniors suffer from tragic falls – the leading cause of death from injury among our elderly population.

Nearly 95 percent of adults over the age of 60 have a chronic health condition and 80 percent have two or more chronic conditions like high blood pressure, arthritis and diabetes.

Seniors throughout our country, particularly in rural areas, lack the transportation they need to get to a doctor's office, the grocery store or the dentist.

That should not be happening in the United States of America, the richest country in the history of the world.

Now, here is the good news.

We have a very effective piece of legislation on the books to address these needs and that is the Older Americans Act.

As we all know, since 1965, the Older Americans Act has provided federal funding for many essential services for our nation's seniors including helping them live at home, preventing loneliness and isolation, preventing disease, supporting job training, protecting against elder abuse, and

providing rides to the doctor's office and grocery store.

Perhaps most importantly, about 45 percent of funding from this legislation is used to provide meals to millions of frail and isolated seniors through Meals on Wheels and congregate meal programs at senior centers.

The good news is that over 2 million seniors receive nutrition services each year under the Older Americans Act.

The bad news is that due to a lack of funding, roughly 4 out of 5 seniors who need a home-delivered or congregate meal do not receive one and many are put on waiting lists that can last for several months.

That is something that this legislation begins to address.

And let's be clear: Not only does the Older Americans Act save lives and ease human suffering, it saves money.

In fact, it costs less to feed a senior for an entire year through the Older Americans Act than it does for a senior to spend one night in a hospital.

Providing adequate nutrition services for seniors also reduces the need for nursing home care. In America today, the median cost of a private room in a nursing home is over \$100,000 a year.

Unfortunately, funding for the Older Americans Act has gone down by nearly 20% after adjusting for inflation and population growth since 2016 – even though the demand for its services has gone up.

The legislation we are marking-up today would begin to reverse that trend.

This legislation also strengthens our nation's senior centers; makes it easier for seniors to receive routine health screenings to detect and prevent chronic health conditions; provides more resources to our nation's home health care workers; takes important steps to prevent social isolation and loneliness; expands access to nutritious meals for our seniors; and begins to address the serious mental health needs of seniors.

While I believe there is much more that we must do to reduce the senior poverty rate in America and to make sure that every senior in America has access to the services they need this bi-partisan legislation is a very good step forward. I would urge my colleagues to vote for it.

Let me thank Senators Cassidy, Casey, Collins, Kaine, Mullin, and Markey, for their leadership on this legislation and for working with me to make it happen.

The second bill we will be considering is **S. 4762, the Autism CARES Act**, led by Senators Lujan and Collins.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 out of every 36 children in America has autism spectrum disorder. This bill reauthorizes multiple programs in the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provide support for research, services and training related to autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities.

The third bill is **S. 4755, the Traumatic Brain Injury Program Reauthorization Act**, led by Senators Mullin and Casey.

Traumatic brain injuries affect the lives of people of all ages but it can be particularly difficult for people who are at least 75 years of age. Older Americans experience about one-third of all hospitalizations and deaths as a result of these serious injuries. This

legislation would provide more federal resources to help prevent Traumatic Brain Injuries, to conduct research on it and to provide services to Americans who are suffering from these injuries.

If we pass these bills out of our committee, we will have successfully marked-up 32 bills this Congress. While I am proud of that record, I understand much more needs to be done.

I look forward to continuing our work together on this committee in the weeks and months ahead.

Senator Cassidy, you are now recognized for an opening statement.