What Our Representatives Must Do to Pass a 2018 Federal Budget that Supports Aging Services

The Senior Services Coalition is urging our Congressional Representatives to champion federal funding for aging services. In July the House Appropriations Committee released a 2018 Labor-HHS Budget Bill and the House Budget Committee released a 2018 Budget Resolution. Together, the proposals cut and eliminate many federal workforce, education, health and support programs that make up the foundation of aging services infrastructure in Alameda County and California, and are lifelines for many older Americans.

This budget still must pass the full House of Representatives and then the Senate. However, we have watched congress' poor track record when it comes to championing the needs of older Americans, and we are deeply concerned about the future of aging services.

Here is a summary of aging services at risk in the House Labor-HHS Appropriations bill:

State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP, known as HICAP in California)   The President proposed to eliminate funding for SHIP, and the House Appropriations bill does exactly that with a cut of $47 million. Each year SHIPs support 15,000+ counselors who provide free, state-specific assistance to over 6 million people.
  ➢ In Alameda County, HICAP is provided by Legal Assistance for Seniors, and helps thousands of people navigate the complexities of Medicare, many of them referred to HICAP by the Medicare 800 help line.

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)   The House Appropriations bill cuts the program by an additional 25% (the program has been cut in half since 2010) and moves it from Labor to the Administration on Community Living. Last year under SCSEP, 70,000 older people received on-the-job training while providing nearly 36 million hours of staff support to 30,000 organizations.

CDC Falls Prevention   The House bill would eliminate the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) in the ACA, but would continue discretionary funding for several prevention programs, including level-fund the Center for Disease Control's Fall Prevention program, but moves it into the ACL's discretionary budget, thus putting it at risk. Every 11 seconds an older adult is treated in an emergency room for a fall-related injury.

Chronic Disease Self-Management Education   The House bill cuts federal funding for chronic disease self-management training from $8 million to $5 million, a cut of 38%. Two-thirds of older Americans have two or more chronic diseases.

Elder Justice Act   The House bill level funds the Long-Term Care Ombudsman and Prevention of Elder Abuse and Neglect programs. But it cuts the Elder Rights Support Activities and the Elder Justice Initiative by $2 million, disabling efforts to develop a national Adult Protective Services data system and to continue elder abuse research.

Older Americans Act Programs   The House bill rejects the President's cuts and maintains funding levels for Supportive Services (case management, friendly visiting, adult day care, and other essential services), Congregate Nutrition, Meals On Wheels, and Family Caregiver Support.
 ➢ In Alameda County, these Older Americans Act services, together with HICAP and SCSEP serve over 65,000 older people.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)   The House ignored the President's proposal to eliminate this program that helps low-income individuals pay for their heating and cooling costs – maintaining the current funding at $3.39 billion. About a third of the 6.8 million households receiving LIHEAP benefits include an older adult aged 60+.
 ➢ In Alameda County, over 6,000 older adults and families with children received help with high utility bills last year.

Block Grants   The House bill largely rejects the President's elimination of federal block grants that support work in local communities to improve economic security and independence for low-income families and seniors. The bill level-funds the Community Development Block Grant and Social Services Block Grant, but cuts the Community Services Block Grant by $115 million (16%).

Senior Corps & AmeriCorps   The House bill retains current funding levels, rejecting the President's proposal to eliminate both of these national service programs that enlist older people in volunteerism and serve seniors in communities nationwide.

Here is a summary of core aging programs at risk in the House 2018 Budget Resolution:

Medicaid and Medicare   The House Resolution would cut $487 billion from Medicare and $1.5 trillion from Medicaid over the next decade (slashing that program nearly in half). Almost 7 million low-income older Americans rely on Medicaid; over 46 million rely on Medicare.
 ➢ In Alameda County, 47,400 people age 65+ rely on Medi-Cal coverage. Medi-Cal pays for In-Home Supportive Services to care for over 21,000 elders, children and adults with disabilities. It covers Adult Day Health Care for over 1,000 people with complex medical needs, and 380 case management slots for elders eligible for skilled nursing who want to live at home.

Social Security   The House proposes to reduce benefits provided through Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). There is concern that Supplemental Security Income (SSI) will also be targeted for reductions. These cuts would threaten the survival of low-income seniors who depend on SSDI and SSI to pay for housing, food, and other essentials.
 ➢ About 54,000 seniors and people with disabilities rely on SSI. The 2017 maximum grant level for an individual in California is $895 a month, about 10% less than the poverty level.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (CalFresh in California)   The President proposed cutting SNAP funding by 25% over 10 years and scrapping policies that streamline access for seniors and people with disabilities. The House proposes even deeper cuts. Almost 5 million Older Americans rely on SNAP benefits to afford food.
 ➢ The Alameda County Community Food Bank, which helped 4,438 people apply for CalFresh in 2016, reports that the number of older adults seeing food assistance is growing.