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[DATE]

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
United States House of Representatives
568 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Inclusion of Social Isolation and Loneliness Language in the Final 2024 Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of [ORGANIZATION NAME], a proud member of The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness ([CESIL](#)) alongside 55 other [multi-sector partners](#), we write to thank Congress for its prompt efforts to reauthorize the Older Americans Act. We commend actions to maximize the independence, well-being, and health of older adults, people with disabilities across the lifespan, and their families and caregivers. The Older Americans Act (OAA) is an opportunity to support community-based organizations in addressing the public health crisis of social isolation and loneliness among older adults in the United States. As Congress continues to negotiate critical bipartisan legislation to strengthen and modernize services for older Americans, we urge Congress to consider the inclusion additional provisions aimed at improving and scaling services that address the negative health effects of social isolation and loneliness and foster social connection.

[Add a description of your organization, your mission/vision, and why you are interested in supporting the OAA.]

As you know, nearly half of older adults feel isolated, alone, or left out.¹ [Share data, statistics, and stories from your organization on the impacts of social isolation and loneliness among older adults. We've included some statistics as examples.]

Studies indicate that anywhere from 25 to 45 percent of the total U.S. population are socially isolation or lonely, or both, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{2, 3, 4} Research conducted at Brigham Young University shows that social isolation and loneliness are associated with a 29 percent and 26 percent increased risk of

¹ G. Anderson and C. Thayer, AARP Research. Social Isolation: Myths vs. Realities Among Older Adults Age 40 and Over. 2018.

² Kaiser Family Foundation. Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan: An International Survey. 2018. <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Report-Loneliness-and-Social-Isolation-in-the-United-States-the-United-Kingdom-and-Japan-An-International-Survey>

³ National Academies of Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering. The Health and Medical Dimensions of Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults. 2020. <https://www.nap.edu/resource/25663/Social%20Isolation%20and%20Loneliness%20Report%20Highlights.pdf>

⁴ CIGNA. "U.S. Loneliness Index: Survey of 20,000 Americans Surveying Behaviors Driving Loneliness in the United States." 2018. <https://www.cigna.com/assets/docs/newsroom/loneliness-survey-2018-full-report.pdf>

mortality, respectively, comparable to that of obesity and cigarette smoking.⁵ In addition to negative health effects, it is estimated that Medicare spends \$6.7 billion every year as a result of individuals being socially isolated.⁶ These deleterious consequences have justified U.S. Surgeon General Murthy calling social isolation and loneliness an epidemic that harms individual and societal health.⁷ In addition, the World Health Organization launched a new Commission on Social Connection, highlighting social isolation and loneliness as global health priorities and a serious public health threat that must be addressed to enhance mental and physical wellbeing.⁸

To this end, we are very appreciative of your leadership in including a number of important provisions to address the national crisis of social isolation and loneliness in the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee’s Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2024 bill which passed committee (20-1). These provisions will improve the quality of life for older adults and save valuable resources. Specifically, the social isolation and loneliness provisions in the bill:

- a) Includes “strategies to address social isolation” within the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Healthy Aging and Age Friendly Communities’ activities to enhance the overall coordination of federally funded programs and services that impact older individuals, identify barriers to access and use, and makes such recommendations to meet the needs of older adults.
- b) Extends the sunset date of the RAISE Family Caregivers Act to September 30, 2029, and includes trauma-informed counseling, peer supports, and elder abuse prevention to the Caregiver Support Services.
- c) Includes projects that service individuals in younger generations and older individuals in developing, carrying out, and promoting participation in multigenerational activities at multipurpose senior center, long-term care facility, and other residential facility for older adults.
- d) Includes social isolation and loneliness in the recommendations to be developed by the White House Conference on Aging to guide the Executive and Legislative branches in improving Federal programs serving older individuals.

[Organization name or “We”] strongly supports the inclusion of these and other crucial provisions to support the millions of Americans affected by social isolation and chronic loneliness.

In tandem, we strongly encourage Congress to provide increased funding authorizations to allow the Aging Network to meet the growing needs of our rapidly aging population. Significantly higher levels of funding are needed across all OAA programs to continue delivering the high-quality programs already authorized in the OAA. Additional investments are needed to further strengthen Area Agencies on Aging, community-based organizations, and other Aging Network partners’ capacity to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older adults and caregivers. Specifically increased funding levels are needed:

[Tailor these recommendations to your organization’s priorities. Below are CESIL’s priorities, for reference.]

- a) **For OAA nutrition programs and supportive services to enhance community-based assistance and community service programs;** like social connection, adequate nutrition and

⁵ J. Holt-Lundstad, et. al. Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. 2016.

⁶ AARP Public Policy Institute. Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults. 2017.

⁷ U.S. Surgeon General. “New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm about the Devastating Impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States.” May 3, 2023.

⁸ World Health Organization. WHO Commission on Social Connection. 2023. <https://www.who.int/groups/commission-on-social-connection>

access to healthy, affordable food are key to an individual's health and well-being. Older adults in rural geographic areas face unique challenges maintaining community connections and accessing nutrition and/or other social and healthcare services as is, which are further compounded by physical limitations, transportation constraints, inadequate financial resources, and/or other obstacles to accessing resources needed for healthy living and aging.⁹ Due to these challenges in accessing food, social services, and connection, it is critical to support proven community-based nutrition and aging programs and other Aging Network interventions that promote social connection.

- b) **To expand multigenerational support services as a part of community programs through title III B of the OAA;** data indicates that older adults participating in intergenerational programs experience a stronger sense of community, reduced social isolation, enhanced quality of life, increased life satisfaction, and a heightened sense of purpose, self-worth, self-esteem, and empowerment.¹⁰ By fostering connections between generations, these services create a network of support that extends beyond immediate family circles which also aids in alleviating some of the challenges faced by caregivers.
- c) **To expand access to evidence-based disease prevention and health promotion services and advance care planning;** providing evidence-based or evidence-informed preventative interventions at the community level, older adults can better manage their health, preventing potential issues before they escalate. This not only enhances the overall health of older adults and those with disabilities, decreases costs, but also empowers older adults to take an active role in their well-being.
- d) **To extend the RAISE Family Caregivers Act and bolster the National Family Caregiver Support Program capacity to provide resources, access to services, respite, education, and training;** Caregivers play a crucial role in supporting the well-being and independence of older adults and acknowledging their efforts through the program aids in recognizing the valuable contributions they make. However, the responsibilities they take on can be physically and emotionally draining as research shows that nearly 4 in 10 caregivers consider their caregiving situation to be highly stressful, thus support for this population is imperative.

Overall, [Organization] supports your leadership to create bipartisan legislation which improves the efficiency and effectiveness of OAA services and programs. We congratulate you on your work to reauthorize the Older Americans Act thus far and look forward to supporting a final bill that includes these provisions. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this critically important issue. If you have any questions, please contact [Point of contact name, position, and email].

Sincerely,

[Signature]

⁹ Henning-Smith, C., Tuttle, M., Tanem, J., Jantzi, K., Kelly, E., & Florence, L. C. (2022). Social Isolation and Safety Issues among Rural Older Adults Living Alone: Perspectives of Meals on Wheels Programs, *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, DOI: 10.1080/08959420.2022.2081025

¹⁰ Generations United. Making The Case for Intergenerational Programs. March 2021. <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2021/03/2021-MakingTheCase-WEB.pdf>