

May 31, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

The undersigned organizations that serve and advocate for older Americans thank you for investing in job training for unemployed older Americans by funding the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018. As you write your bill for fiscal year (FY) 2019, we ask that you fund SCSEP at the authorized level of \$463,809,605 to ensure older adults with significant barriers to employment can access work-based community service training in their communities.

The 2018 theme of this month's Older Americans Month is *Engage at Every Age*. In employment, older Americans are engaging at record levels, outpacing the overall growth of the labor force, according to Bureau of Labor Statistic (BLS) data.ⁱ Older adults are working longer due to a growing insecurity of retirement income and other factors.ⁱⁱ According to a recent U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging report, older adults who are working or seeking employment face many workplace challenges, including age discrimination, inadequate training opportunities, and long-term unemployment.ⁱⁱⁱ And even in today's strong job market, older adults are taking twice as long as younger job seekers in returning to the workforce after becoming unemployed.^{iv} The Special Committee on Aging report identified SCSEP as one of the avenues for older workers to acquire new skills and to find employment.

SCSEP is the only federal job training program focused exclusively on helping older Americans return to the workforce. Through the program, low-income older job seekers receive on-the-job training at local nonprofit and government programs, including libraries, senior centers, and schools. Each year the program helps about 60,000 older adults from every state and congressional district to develop new work experiences and skills needed to find jobs. The program is required to serve most-in-need older adults, age 55 or older, who enter the program, on average, with two to three barriers to employment.^v For example, SCSEP provided employment supports to individuals with disabilities (21%), who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness (55%), who have low employment prospects (91%), and who reside in rural areas (27%) or in areas of persistent unemployment (17%). In addition, nearly seven in 10 SCSEP participants are women and one in 10 is a veteran.^{vi}

Our organizations were disappointed that the President's FY 2019 budget once again proposes to eliminate SCSEP, citing the program's \$7,300 per participant cost as not being cost-effective.^{vii} The cost reflects the congressional mandate that at least 75 percent of SCSEP funds are provided directly to SCSEP participants for training wages and benefits.^{viii} During their training, older adults enrolled in the program earn minimum wage, helping them to greatly improve their

economic self-sufficiency, one of two goals Congress established for SCSEP. About 88 percent of all SCSEP participants have family incomes at or below the poverty level. The program's other goal is to help increase the number of older adults in unsubsidized employment. Despite entering the program with multiple barriers to employment, thousands of older adults from every state found jobs last year. And SCSEP participants who exit for employment earn more in their first year than the annual SCSEP training costs, resulting in a strong return on the federal investment, according to a 2017 Urban Institute study.^{ix} After one year on the job, the vast majority of former SCSEP participants (67.8%) remain employed in those positions.

SCSEP is meeting the goals set out by Congress and is meeting an important employment need in our country. However, current funding levels are insufficient to cover even one percent of eligible older adults or to allow participants to train for more than 15 hours a week, on average.^x
We hope you will continue your strong support for the Senior Community Service Employment Program by funding the program at the authorized level of \$463,809,605.

Our organizations are pleased to share additional information with you on the program's enormous impact. If you have further questions, please contact Maynard Friesz at 202-403-8345 or mfriesz@easterseals.com. Thank you.

American GI Forum of the US
 Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
 Easterseals
 Goodwill Industries International, Inc.
 The Jewish Federations of North America
 MANA, A National Latina Organization
 National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
 National Able Network, Inc.
 National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
 National Association for Hispanic Elderly
 National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
 National Association of Development Organizations
 National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
 National Association of RSVP Directors
 National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
 National Caucus and Center in Black Aging, Inc.
 National Council on Aging
 National Farmers Union
 National Indian Council on Aging, Inc. (NICOA)
 National Latina/o Psychological Association
 National Skills Coalition
 National Urban League
 Operation A.B.L.E.
 SER -Jobs for Progress National Inc.
 The Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
 The WorkPlace
 Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)

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- ⁱ [Bureau of Labor Statistics Labor Review](#), U.S. Department of Labor, 2015
- ⁱⁱ [Older Workers Report](#), U.S. Government Accountability Report, 2007
- ⁱⁱⁱ [America's Aging Workforce: Opportunities and Challenges Report](#), U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, December, 2017
- ^{iv} [Bureau of Labor Statistics Labor Force Statistics](#), U.S. Department of Labor, April, 2018
- ^v [SCSEP Quarterly Progress Report](#), U.S. Department of Labor, Program Year 2016
- ^{vi} [SCSEP Quarterly Progress Report](#), U.S. Department of Labor, Program Year 2016
- ^{vii} [An American Budget: Major Savings and Reforms](#), Office of Management and Budget, February, 2018
- ^{viii} [What minimum expenditure levels are required for participant wages and benefits?](#), 20 CFR 641.873
- ^{ix} [The Role of SCSEP in Workforce Training for Low-Income Older Adults](#), Urban Institute, October, 2017
- ^x [The Role of SCSEP in Workforce Training for Low-Income Older Adults](#), Urban Institute, October, 2017