March 28, 2012

James P. Firman, Ed.D.
President and CEO
National Council on Aging
1901 L Street NW, 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

Dear President Firman,

I am writing to express my support for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA). One of society’s most important obligations is to care for those who cannot care for themselves. Whether that is an aging parent or a person with a disability, we have a duty to protect those most in need of care. The OAA is the major federal vehicle for the delivery of social and nutrition services for older persons, and the reauthorization is vital to sustaining quality programs and services for seniors nationwide.

The OAA, first enacted in 1965, ensures that all Americans have safety, dignity, and support in their senior years. Programs authorized under the OAA provide much-needed services to older individuals in the community as well as their caregivers. These include critical services to prevent the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older persons – an issue that is increasing as baby boomers age and more individuals entrust guardians to manage their personal and financial affairs. While the vast majority of court-appointed guardians are undoubtedly professional, well-meaning, and law-abiding, there is mounting evidence that some guardians use their position of power for their own gain and at the expense of the very people they were supposed to be protecting.

In 2011, the Government Accountability Office found that only 13 states conduct criminal background checks on guardians, and current rules for screening and monitoring guardians vary from state to state. That is why I introduced the Guardianship Accountability and Senior Protection Act, which would amend OAA and promote criminal background checks for potential guardians, implement electronic filing systems for background check records, and allow state courts to improve their practices and policies with respect to guardianships.

I will continue to support the reauthorization of OAA so elderly Americans have the support and services they need to maintain their independence. Thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of families and elderly individuals. I look forward to working with you as we consider this legislation.

Sincerely,

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator