Dear Senators Alexander, Murray, Burr, and Sanders:

On behalf of the National Council on Aging (NCOA), I am writing to commend you for bipartisan leadership in introducing S. 192, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization of 2015, and moving expeditiously to markup early in the 114th Congress. We urge the Committee to favorably report the legislation to the Senate.

As you know, the OAA expired in 2011, and reauthorization is a crucial opportunity for Congress to modernize and improve services by supporting efficiencies and innovations, reassessing the Act’s successes and limitations, and addressing its ability to effectively serve older adults in need. It is notable that in the midst of various competing demands before the Committee, you have chosen to make renewal of the OAA a priority, particularly as we prepare to mark the 50th anniversary of this important statute. Your commitment to the efforts of the Aging Services Network to empower seniors to remain healthy and independent in their own homes and communities is to be commended.

A number of NCOA’s priorities for reauthorization are reflected in S. 192. These provisions include creating new support for modernizing multipurpose senior centers, highlighting the importance of addressing economic needs, requiring that health promotion and disease prevention initiatives be evidence-based, and promoting chronic condition self-management and falls prevention. We are also supportive of the inclusion of stronger elder justice and legal services provisions, needed clarity for caregiver support and Aging and Disability Resource Centers, and new opportunities for intergenerational shared sites.

It is also significant that the bill in its current form does no harm and does not include provisions that we oppose or that would keep the bill from receiving broad bipartisan support on the Senate floor. For example, the most significant reason why the Act has not yet fully realized its true potential has been a lack of resources. Funding has not kept pace with inflation or demand, and sequester and other recent cuts have significantly eroded OAA dollars and increased waiting lists. Therefore, we are pleased that S. 192 rejects attempts to reduce OAA authorized funding levels and preserves the ability to make key investments through 2018.

We applaud your efforts to make OAA reauthorization a priority in this anniversary year, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to promote a bipartisan, bicameral process that remains true to the history of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

James Firman
President and CEO