

June 21, 2019

Chairman Lamar Alexander
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

Ranking Member Patty Murray
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

RE: Recommendations for Improving Committee Draft of the Older
Americans Act Reauthorization

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, I wish to thank you for your commitment to reauthorizing the Older Americans Act and urge you to prioritize issues related to food insecurity among seniors—with particular attention paid to the needs of LGBT seniors—as you advance the bill.

Inspired by Jewish values and ideals, MAZON is a national advocacy organization working to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the U.S. and Israel. For more than 30 years, MAZON has been committed to ensuring that vulnerable people have access to the resources they need to put food on the table. MAZON is a leading voice throughout the country on anti-hunger issues, especially those that involve populations and problems that have been previously overlooked or ignored—this includes food insecurity among seniors and particularly LGBT seniors. It is with this experience and perspective that we address your committee's efforts to reauthorize the Older Americans Act.

As you know, millions of American seniors struggle with hunger and millions more are aging into poverty. MAZON's efforts have emphasized the need to ensure that there is a robust government nutrition safety net that is well-funded and easily accessible by those who must rely upon it. MAZON is also committed to identifying and working to remove barriers to access and participation in these programs, including for LGBT seniors who typically face unique and persistent challenges to accessing such programs and the complementary services offered through the charitable food network.

Limited data are available about food insecurity among LGBT seniors, which is why MAZON has made it a priority to pursue more comprehensive research in partnership with the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law. From the data that is available, we know that 60% of LGBT seniors are more likely to experience food insecurity than their

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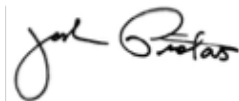
non-LGBT counterparts, with higher levels among transgender and non-white LGBT seniors. However, only 42% of eligible seniors actually enroll in SNAP in comparison to 83% of all eligible people. Furthermore, half of all Americans living with HIV are over age 50, as are 15% of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses and 29% of those living with AIDS. It is important to note that hunger is particularly devastating to those who are aging with HIV or AIDS, because lack of reliable access to proper nutrition causes a drastic reduction in life expectancy rates.

MAZON urges you to consider the following policy solutions, many of which have been proposed in the Inclusive Aging Act (S. 1159), the Elder Pride Act (H.R. 2312), and the Ruthie & Connie LGBT Elder Americans Act (H.R. 1777):

- Designate LGBT seniors as a population of “Greatest Social Need” to increase funding for LGBT-inclusive programs and help target local services to the needs of LGBT seniors;
- Ensure that U.S. government nutrition programs for seniors do not include either explicit or implicit discrimination against LGBT seniors, particularly in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services’ (HHS) programs like SNAP and OAA-funded nutrition programs;
- Create an Office of Inclusivity and Sexual Health in the Administration for Community Living—this office would facilitate data collection on LGBT older adults, issue funding opportunities that would support LGBT people (including a rural outreach grant program), and promote policies to help address the specific needs of LGBT seniors.

We look forward to working with you to address these critically important issues as you move forward with the Older Americans Act reauthorization.

Sincerely,



Josh Protas
Vice President of Public Policy
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

CC:
Senator Susan Collins
Senator Bob Casey