

On Wednesday, the Older Americans Act took an important step forward. The Senate HELP committee reported the OAA favorably out of committee without amendments. It passed by voice vote. Ordinarily the next step would be a vote by the full senate, but Chairman Harkin would like to continue working on an unresolved funding issue before the full senate votes. I will explain this below.

As you may know, this OAA reauthorization included minimal, but important improvements to the OAA. One of those improvements is the Holocaust survivor language. This is a significant step in our leaders' recognition of the importance of aging in place services for this vulnerable population. Congratulations and thank you for your advocacy efforts in bringing this issue to the forefront. It is not the RUSH Act (which would have added Holocaust survivors to the definition of greatest social need and acknowledged the higher cost of kosher foods in home-delivered and congregate meals). Rather, this language directs the Administration on Aging to consult with organizations that serve survivors to develop and issue guidance to states on how to conduct outreach to and serve Holocaust survivors. It is binding and enforceable. This developed from the positive momentum of the RUSH Act and from the Jewish community's helpful advocacy. It should be noted that having this language included is a major lift for the committee and many other priorities were not included. Other technical improvements to the OAA are in the areas of transportation, elder abuse prevention, and caregiving.

There was one amendment to the OAA regarding funding formulas that did not pass, but sparked constructive debate. At issue is the formula by which states receive money for OAA services. Historically it was done by population of seniors. Sen. Burr of North Carolina offered an amendment to change the formula to reflect current population of seniors per state. This new recipe would not have increased the pot of money available; rather, it would take from some states and give to others.

Virtually all senators at the markup agreed that there are wait lists in every state and that the need is great. But many senators present suggested changing the formula in a way that considered more than population numbers, taking into consideration the utilization of OAA services. This could consider poverty rates, the cost of living, the cost of serving rural vs urban areas, and the affluence of the senior population in various states.

Chairman Harkin announced that he would create a bipartisan working group to examine this issue before the OAA goes to the Senate floor. He will task this group with recommending a solution that will be passable and fair.

It is possible that the working group will reach an agreement and recommend an amendment to the OAA when it gets to the senate floor. It is also possible they will not find a consensus. In that case, it is unclear whether the OAA will get to the full senate.

We will keep you posted as this unfolds and will call upon you provide information about seniors in your state, and about their utilization of OAA services, as needed. Thank you for the strong showing of support these past few weeks, and years, of working to reauthorize the OAA. We are heartened by the helpful comments made by the Senators at the markup, and believe they share our goal in working to help seniors most in need.

Please stay in touch and let [Shelley Rood](#) know if you have questions.