



Building Regional Communities

**NARC**

## National Association of Regional Councils

1666 Connecticut Avenue, N. W.  
Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20009  
202.986.1032  
202.986.1038 (fax)  
[www.narc.org](http://www.narc.org)

**DATE:** Monday, April 10, 2006

**TO:** Senate Subcommittee on Retirement Security and Aging and Full  
HELP Committee  
United States Senate

**FROM:** Robert Sokolowski, Executive Director

**SUBJECT:** NARC Comments for Interested Groups Feedback Meetings  
Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization  
Monday, April 10, 2006  
2:00 pm – 2:15 pm

NARC appreciates the opportunity to present its public policy statement on the Older Americans Act that we respectfully ask be included as deliberations on the legislation continue. The OAA will have an impact on those regional councils that effectively manage and operate Area Agencies on Aging and that are represented by NARC. NARC is prepared to collaborate with the committee further and provide additional information of value on the work of regional organizations whose portfolio of activities includes grassroots assistance programs for the elderly. If asked, we are prepared to present testimony that reflects the value of regional councils as area agencies on aging.

NARC's staff resource and contact is Ella Rusinko, Policy Director, who can be reached at 202.986.1032, extension 215, or via email at [ella@narc.org](mailto:ella@narc.org).



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## **National Association of Regional Councils Statement of Policy on**

The Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act  
OAA Feedback Meetings  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Senate Subcommittee on Retirement Security and Aging

### **Background**

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity and public interest group that represents and advocates for the nation's regional councils (RCs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). RCs and MPOs are experienced, key players in the planning and program delivery process. Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are frequently under the umbrella of an RC. Planning promotes competitiveness through diverse initiatives realized through collaboration and strategic partnerships. Regional councils are community-based organizations that deliver or manage federal, state or local programs to reach a multi-service area.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is the nation's backbone to providing a quality of life for older Americans and with dignity. The OAA has provided meaningful interventions that help seniors live safely and independently. Now more than ever as the baby boomers have aged, it has become important for American communities to make sure they are prepared to promote a healthy and productive life for an aging population. The OAA's legislative mandate has been consistently reaffirmed through the many meaningful grassroots options it offers seniors and through its effective and efficient use of the national aging network. The network includes the 650 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and the 240 Title VI Native American aging programs in place around the country. It is a well known fact that more than eight million older adults are benefiting from the support structure provided by the OAA.

The portfolio of services and programs that regional councils provide includes senior services management, delivery, coordination and referral at the grassroots level. Of the 650 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), about one-third of these organizations are housed within regional councils. AAAs were established under the OAA in 1973 for the purpose of serving the needs of Americans aged 60 and over in the nation's communities. These organizations help seniors by providing information on and referrals to resources available in the community, such as in-home care, housing availability, transportation services, prescription drug assistance programs, and elder rights protections. These organizations adeptly partner with local governments and others to leverage funds provided through federal sources to assure that the needs of seniors are appropriately planned for and the needs met. A better quality of life for millions of older adults is of primary importance to AAAs, especially now with so many "baby boomers" approaching their sixties.

## **Comments**

NARC has canvassed its membership on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and is pleased to present their best thinking on some issues of relevance and importance to regional councils that manage AAAs in their communities. NARC's comments are submitted for your consideration and for any appropriate official record on the consideration of OAA. The comments are the consensus opinion of NARC's membership.

### [Administration on Aging Proposal on States' Management of AAAs](#)

The Administration through the Administration on Aging (AoA) has proposed that states be allowed to assume the responsibility for the management and operations of AAAs. NARC has been advised by AoA that the provision was intended to address a situation unique to one U. S. territory (Puerto Rico) that was experiencing problems with two AAAs and has been appealing every year to AoA for the last five years for permission to manage its two AAAs. A U. S. territory is included in the definition of a state in the OAA.

NARC members are concerned that the current language to address the needs of one U. S. territory extends new power to all states because of the definition contained in the OAA. This would be true despite assurances about the independent operation of AAAs. NARC's members would favor a provision in the OAA that addresses the unique needs of Puerto Rico or that of U. S. territories.

Maintaining the integrity of the local grassroots delivery mechanism for OAA authorized services leverages federal funding with other resources that generally come from local communities and their partners. NARC members believe that state control would adversely affect the support and commitment of local communities to OAA services. State control would remove the ownership many communities have for their local meals on wheels, transportation and senior center services and would likely limit local government and foundation funding.

### [Fiscal Year 2007 Congressional Budget Request](#)

NARC's membership is very concerned about funding levels for all programs that affect the nation's aging population. Maintaining or reducing funding for many of these programs threatens the OAA's ability to meet the needs of the growing older adult population. Planning for the needs of the baby boom generation is important and should be reflected across federal planning programs and Regional Councils, particularly those that house AAAs, are well positioned to do this. Some federal programs, such as transportation, require the inclusion of older adult needs in planning activities. Regional councils are also known for their experience and expertise as planners of comprehensive land use and livable communities' issues that are particularly important to older adults who are aging in place.

### [Health and Wellness Programs](#)

Just as the population of older adults is about to double, the President's budget proposes eliminating funding for Health and Wellness Programs under Part III-D of the Older Americans Act. Prevention and health promotion are the best investment of our federal dollars, as these programs keep older adults healthy and reduce demand for other expensive services.

### [Prescription Drug Assistance](#)

Some AAA regional councils have recently found that a great deal of their time has been expended on prescription drug assistance, especially for those older adults who cannot afford the high cost of prescription medications. These organizations are absorbing the

costs of providing this much needed service in America's communities and would like to see some assistance to help with this important effort that helps seniors.

#### [Aging and Disability Resource Centers](#)

The Aging and Disability Resource Centers are a part of the Administration's New Freedom Initiative. The purpose of these programs is to advance coordinated one-stop centers, responsible for clearinghouse activities about aging and disability services. Regional councils believe it is important for these networks to grow in communities in all states and would support permanently establishing these centers in OAA reauthorization legislation.

#### [Comprehensive Planning for Growing Older Population](#)

NARC members support adding new language to the Older Americans Act to address the immediate need for organized, informed and thoughtful planning around the retirement of the baby boom population. Funds would support a planning staff position in every AAA to better assist not only the aging network but local elected officials, local governments and private and nonprofit agencies to develop programs and services which foster livable communities for all ages. This provision would sunset in 10 years.

#### [Conclusion](#)

We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments to Congressional staff on the reauthorization of the OAA and the concerns and positions of NARC's membership for various aspects of the legislation. NARC respectfully requests full consideration of our concerns and the inclusion of appropriate legislative language to address the issues that will improve community preparedness to support the needs of the Nation's growing population of older adults. If asked, NARC would be pleased to testify on the reauthorization of OAA. Thank you.