

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health & Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health & Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran,

As you prepare the FY2011 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill, we ask that the Senate include the fully authorized level of \$94.81 million for *Lifespan Respite Care Act* (PL 109-442) programs.

Respite care, the most frequently requested family support service, provides temporary relief from continuous caregiving of family members with disabilities or chronic conditions. It has been shown to provide family caregivers with the relief necessary to maintain their own health, balance work and family, bolster family stability, keep marriages intact, and avoid or delay more costly nursing home or foster care placements.

Following its widely supported enactment in 2006, *Lifespan Respite Care* was first funded at \$2.5 million in Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010. The President's Fiscal Year 2011 Budget submission included \$5 million for *Lifespan Respite Care*, the first enhancement of funding since the program's enactment. We are very appreciative and encouraged by the President's recommendation given today's challenging budgetary climate. However, his recommendations focused on the needs of family caregivers of the aging population. The fact is that more than half (56%) of the nation's care recipients with a disabling or chronic condition are under age 75 and 28% are under age 50. Even with the proposed increase in *Lifespan Respite Care*, the funding remains inadequate to meet the needs in our communities.

As the only federal program to address respite accessibility and affordability issues for families regardless of age or disability, it serves a critical and unique purpose. The nation's estimated 50 million family caregivers provide about 80% of long-term care in the United States. A recent AARP study estimates the economic value of uncompensated family caregiving at \$375 billion -- more than total Medicaid spending, including both federal and state contributions for both medical and long-term care in 2007. Moreover, in these times of serious budget constraints, respite provides a valuable tool to aid in economic recovery and even creates more jobs as respite providers are recruited and trained.

For families and individuals who may not qualify for any public or private respite funding, including children with severe disabilities, teens with serious emotional and psychological conditions, and adults with Multiple Sclerosis, ALS, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injuries, cancer, Alzheimer's and many other chronic physical and mental health conditions, these programs may be holding out the only helping hand. For our wounded veterans returning home from war with traumatic brain injuries and other polytraumas, lifespan respite systems could be the lifeline their families must turn to in their new roles as life-long family caregivers.

The *Lifespan Respite Care Act* is the only federal program that stands ready to meet these needs with funds for respite start-up, training, and coordination. We urge you to include full funding for the program at \$94.81 million in its last year of authorization. We look forward to working with you on cost-effective and proven ways to support the nation's family caregivers, who are the backbone of our long-term care system.

Sincerely,

Bob Carey, Jr.

Frank R. Lautenberg

Jon Kyl

1st Kamryn

Barbara Mikulski

Rebekah Starobin

Chuck Sch

Kevin Feingold

Jeffrey A. Merkley