

February 6, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
503 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies  
731 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Chairman Harkin:

We are writing to thank you for the successful enactment of an allocation from the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPH Fund) for Elder Falls Prevention. Your persistence over the last few years on behalf of a long-overdue investment to address this problem costing the nation \$30 billion annually is recognized and deeply appreciated by America's seniors, as well as service and health care providers who are working to enhance the safety of older adults and the communities in which they reside.

As you are well aware, each year, one in three Americans aged 65 and over falls. Every 15 seconds, an older adult is treated in the emergency room for a falls-related injury, and every 29 seconds a senior dies as a result of a fall. The annual \$30 billion medical cost is expected to double to \$59.6 billion in 2020, with a cost to Medicare of over \$32 billion. In the face of a rapidly aging population, we need to redouble our efforts to help older adults and their families and caregivers recognize this public health issue and to take steps to reduce their risk of falling.

Senator Mikulski's Safety of Seniors Act, enacted in 2008, authorizes the research and dissemination activities and awareness raising efforts that have resulted in building an evidence base for several interventions and the mobilization of seventy national organizations in the Falls Free® Initiative. Randomized control trials have shown that the evidence-based prevention programs reduce the incidence of falls and the resulting costs by 30% to 55%. A recent HHS study found that the Matter of Balance program reduced medical costs by \$938 per year. In 2013, Falls Free® allies organized annual Falls Prevention Awareness Day activities in a record 47 states and the District of Columbia. States efforts reached over two million individuals through health fairs, falls risk screening clinics, programs and services for older adults, as well as media events and other innovative undertakings making this the biggest observance yet.

But perhaps even more importantly, the chances of falling and of being seriously injured in a fall increase with age. In 2010 the US Census Bureau estimated there were over 1.9 million nonagenarians and that number is rapidly growing. Based on these demographic changes we can expect the number of falls, and fall-related injuries and deaths to increase exponentially unless we make a serious commitment to providing evidence-based, fall risk screening and assessments, and appropriate interventions to those increasingly at risk. The \$5 million investment from the PPH Fund would more than double current federal expenditures on falls prevention. This new funding at the Administration for Community Living will enable the aging services network to deploy the evidence-based programs to reach more vulnerable populations and develop sustainability strategies. These funds will be put to use by states and communities in the service of millions of older adults they serve.

We appreciate that the \$1.9 million for elder falls efforts at the CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control was preserved, and we look forward to working with you to achieve the \$10 million total for falls prevention originally proposed by your Committee, to expand the reach of the proven interventions into local communities and foster sustainable, integrated fall prevention systems and policies in every state.

America's seniors should have access to effective programs and services to help them and their families take steps to reduce their risk and to remain independent and injury free. Your continued support and perseverance is greatly appreciated across the nation as we struggle with the growing issue of falls among the elderly.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Aging Research  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
Alzheimer's Foundation of America  
American Academy of Audiology  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Bone Health  
American Geriatrics Society  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Physical Therapy Association  
American Podiatric Medical Association  
American Society on Aging  
Easter Seals  
Gray Panthers  
LeadingAge  
National Association for Continence  
National Association for Home Care & Hospice  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers  
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs  
National Association of RSVP Directors  
National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities  
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare  
The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long Term Care  
National Council on Aging  
National Senior Corps Association  
OWL - The Voice of Midlife and Older Women  
PHI - Quality Care through Quality Jobs  
Prevent Blindness  
Rebuilding Together  
Safe States Alliance  
Society for Advancement of Violence and Injury Research  
YMCA of the USA