April 6, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Hart Senate Office Building 322
Washington DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer,

The national grantees for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), authorized by Title V of the Older Americans Act, are jointly requesting your support for an additional $500 million in funding for the SCSEP in the next COVID-19 stimulus and relief bill. SCSEP provides vital workforce training services to America’s low-income older workforce age 55 and above.

Workers age 55+ will comprise 25% of the labor force within the next 5 years. Many of these older Americans work out of necessity and provide a dependable part-time workforce to employers such as The Home Depot, Walmart, Target, and more. SCSEP participants also must work and their temporary community service jobs play a vital role in training these jobseekers to continue to support themselves and contribute to our nation’s economic development. COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerability of our nation’s seniors both from the health and economic security perspectives.

SCSEP services are needed as the pathway back to the workforce for older Americans displaced by COVID-19. The additional $500 million in funds will more than double the program’s current capacity by allowing SCSEP grantees to serve between 56,000 to 128,000 eligible individuals that need SCSEP services as well as help prepare current participants for the post COVID-19 workforce. Many participants are currently sheltering in place due to the coronavirus. Many have no access to a computer or internet services which will facilitate their engagement with their community and be active participants in the workforce.

If funded through the new stimulus package, SCSEP providers will use this funding immediately to assist qualified individuals (by providing computers and computer training at home) become part of the modern digital economy that will be fully present post this pandemic. According to the Economic Policy Institute, “Nearly three-fourths of workers age 65 and older—or over 5 million older workers—are unable to telecommute. That means that these workers, who are at
higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 because of their age, could be putting themselves at risk to earn a paycheck.”

Lastly, it is vital that the next stimulus and relief legislation ensure that SCSEP grantees, both state and national, have the legislative authority to guarantee continued payments to current SCSEP participants who are doing their part to flatten the curve by staying at home. Continued payments will protect participants during this crisis from situations like possible eviction for not being able to pay rent.

We thank you for your continued efforts to mitigate the harmful impacts of this pandemic on our nation’s older adults, and we look forward to working with your offices to make sure the next legislative response includes necessary investments in our most important resource: our older workers.

Sincerely,

Senior Service America, Inc.  National Council on Aging
National Caucus on Black Aging  SER Jobs for Progress
Easterseals  Goodwill Industries International, Inc.
National Urban League  The WorkPlace
National Association of Hispanic Elderly  Experience Works
Associates for Training and Development  National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Able Network, Inc.  Operation ABLE
Vantage Aging  National Older Worker Career Center
National Indian Council on Aging  Institute for Indian Development

Cc:
Chair Nita Lowey and Ranking Member Kay Granger, House Committee on Appropriations
Chair Rosa DeLauro and Ranking Member Tom Cole, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Related Agencies
Chair Robert Scott and Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, House Committee on Education and Labor
Chair Richard Shelby and Ranking Member Patrick Leahy, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Chair Roy Blunt and Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Related Agencies
Chair Lamar Alexander and Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions