

Action Alert: Senate Reauthorizes Vital Transportation Programs for Seniors and People with Disabilities

On March 14th the Senate voted 74-22 to reauthorize the transportation bill, 'Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act' (S. 1813), which contains key provisions that benefit America's seniors and persons with disabilities. The Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies and The Jewish Federations of North America, together with partners in aging and transportation services, worked with Congress and the Administration to advocate for this reauthorization. The House could take up a version of this Senate bill, or pass separate legislation. Since the provisions in the Senate bill would benefit seniors and people with disabilities, we **encourage you to contact your Representatives and urge the House to maintain these vital provisions.**

While combining Department of Transportation programs that aid seniors and people with disabilities, the bill authorizes \$248.6 million for fiscal years 2012 and 2013 for the combined Section 5310 services. This represents a \$23 million increase overall, with potentially more benefits for programs supporting these vulnerable populations. The bill reauthorizes the National Center on Senior Transportation, which The Jewish Federations of North America helped establish in 2006.

In addition, the Senate bill allows for grants to be used for operating assistance, improves coordination of programs between the Department of Transportation and the Department of Health and Human Services, and improves data reporting on programs that serve the elderly and people with disabilities. The bill maintains that seniors and individuals with disabilities must be part of the transportation planning process.

"When working with America's seniors, we often find that older adults are unable to rely on friends and family even for their most essential transportation needs like going to the doctor," said Kathy Manning, chair of the board of directors of the Jewish Federations of North America. "As a result, seniors suffer from increasing isolation and deterioration in health and quality of life. The provisions in the transit bill that aid transportation programs for seniors and individuals with disabilities are important for the people that Jewish Federations support across the country."

While older adults largely utilize private cars for transportation, as they age, a majority lose their physical or financial capacity to drive or maintain a car. Individuals with disabilities also face significant challenges with mobility. Finding necessary transportation is difficult, particularly for those living in suburban communities where destinations are too far to walk; public transit is non-existent, poor, or is not integrated with adjoining communities; and private transportation, if available, is limited or prohibitively expensive.

"Since 1975, federally supported transportation services have allowed older adults and persons with disabilities to live independently and prevent isolation from family and community," said William Daroff, vice president for public policy and director of the Washington office of The Jewish Federations of North America. "On behalf of the seniors and people with disabilities that Jewish Federations serve across the country, we are grateful that these programs continue to be strengthened and we will work to retain these improvements as the transit bill makes its way through the legislative process."

Please contact your Representative to urge support for the provisions in the transportation bill affecting seniors and people with disabilities, and contact your Senator to express gratitude for including these provisions in the bipartisan Senate bill.

The House could take up a version of the bipartisan Senate bill or pass its own reauthorization. We believe the provisions for seniors and people with disabilities would fare better under the Senate proposal.

Action Steps

1. Enter your zip code on the top right of the following website to locate the name and phone number of your representative: <http://www.house.gov> . Contact your representative and urge him or her to include the provisions for seniors and people with disabilities (Sec. 5310) from the Senate bill in any House legislation that moves forward.
2. Consult this list, and if your Senator voted yes, proceed to Step 3. There were 74 yeas, 22 nays, and 4 not voting, so most voted yes.
3. Enter your state on the top right of the following website to locate the name and contact information of your senator: <http://www.senate.gov> . Contact your senator and thank him or her for supporting provisions for seniors and people with disabilities.

Thank you very much. Please contact [Shelley Rood](#) with any questions.