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**PUBLIC HEARING ON
THE 2011 REAUTHORIZATION OF THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT
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The Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA) was intended to help older adults maintain maximum independence in their homes and communities and to promote a continuum of care for the vulnerable elderly. When the OAA was reauthorized in 2006, it created additional incentives for states to provide services such as home and community-based long-term care, comprehensive elder justice systems, and mental health screening and treatment. The 2011 reauthorization of the OAA presents an important opportunity to expand upon the local protections available to older adults.

Within the next two decades, one in five Americans will be over 65.¹ The Medicare Rights Center serves these individuals daily, as a nonprofit consumer service organization that works to ensure access to affordable health care for older adults and people with disabilities. From our experience speaking to thousands of people with Medicare every year, Medicare Rights hears about the many challenges faced by older individuals and their families, and witnesses firsthand the role that communities play in keeping their residents healthy. In most circumstances, the Medicare program itself, while valuable, does not help older adults and their families overcome challenges related to services like transportation, meals, and long-term care. In its 2011 reauthorization, the OAA should help communities prepare for new waves of aging adults by providing additional resources to the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and by creating new support systems for caregivers.

Medicare Rights works closely with AAAs in New York and nationally to ensure that people with Medicare have access to comprehensive, community-based assistance. We know that people with Medicare rely heavily on the expertise and support of AAA staff to help them find the home and community-based services that meet their needs. As a result of the support from the AAAs, older adults are able to remain in the homes and communities with dignity as long as possible. To ensure that services such as home care, adult day care, respite, and delivered meals are available nationwide, the reauthorization of the OAA should provide additional funds to the AAAs under Title III.

Similarly, AAAs offer critical support to family caregivers, who often are the key for an older adult being able to live with dignity in their home or community. Family caregivers, nearly 20 percent of whom spend more than 40 hours per week caring for a loved one, have little time to devote to understanding complicated health coverage and health care issues.² Yet it is essential that caregivers know about Medicare. For this reason, caregivers would benefit greatly from regular messages, delivered locally, that draw on the speed and portability of new technologies. The reauthorization of the OAA should create systems that can deliver this kind of needed support.

¹ Center for Disease Control. "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report," based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations (February 2003).

² National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. "Caregiving in the U.S." (April 2004).