

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 15, 2017

Lance Robertson
Administrator
Administration for Community Living
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
300 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Administrator Robertson:

As a Senator from a state with one of the largest percentages of people aged 65 and older, I often hear directly from seniors in Maine who are deeply concerned about their ability to stay in their homes and communities as they age. Federal programs that provide expertise and resources for home modifications can be critical to helping our seniors age safely and independently in place, but resources are spread across several federal agencies and coordination among them appears to be limited. As a result, public awareness of these important resources is low, which means some seniors may be losing out on a much-needed tool to help them age in place. To that end, I am writing to respectfully request that you direct staff within the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to review S. 913, the Senior Home Modification Assistance Initiative Act, to determine if the ACL has the authority to immediately implement any of its provisions or initiatives.

The Senior Home Modification Assistance Initiative Act would establish a process, carried out by the Assistant Secretary for Aging, to better coordinate the many existing federal home modification programs and provide more consumer-friendly information on how those programs can benefit older Americans. It is my understanding that the Older Americans Act (OAA) already contains broad coordination language as part of the duties and functions of the Assistant Secretary for Aging, which would provide the Assistant Secretary with the authority to better coordinate a comprehensive, interagency network of federally-funded home modification resources and efforts on behalf of older Americans in need.

Economic pressures, demographic shifts, and personal preferences have helped create a dynamic where most seniors overwhelmingly want to age in place. According to a 2014 AARP survey, 88 percent of senior households strongly or somewhat agree that they would like to stay in their current residences as long as possible, while 89 percent strongly or somewhat agree they would like to remain in their community as long as possible. Yet there are obstacles to aging in place, the primary one being the cost of home modifications.

In Maine, for example, over 60 percent of the housing stock was built prior to 1980, making it unlikely that a majority of our low-income seniors live in homes with the accessibility features that can make living on their own a safe, realistic option. For these residents, the cost of home assessments and modifications - which are often paid for out of pocket - can add up quickly and

drain limited budgets. However, not making those modifications runs the risk of being costlier in the long run. For example, a serious fall, which is the leading cause of injury for older adults, can result in large costs, both for the senior and for Medicare and Medicaid. Helping seniors age more safely at home may have important federal budgetary implications as well; by making low-cost, discretionary investments in improving home accessibility for older adults, these federal programs may help reduce costs in mandatory health care programs as senior health care outcomes improve.

By helping to untangle the complex web of federal programs that help older Americans modify their homes, you would be helping more seniors age safely in place and positively affecting their quality of life. I appreciate your consideration of this request and your work to support older Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Angus King", with a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator