Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program

We urge Congress to continue funding the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program in FY 2019 at the FY 2018 level of $5 million.

Overview: Notwithstanding the more than seven decades that have passed, for too many Holocaust survivors the horrors of their experience are relived every day. In 2011, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) proposed the creation of the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program, which Congress began funding in FY 2015. The program is a public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Community Living (ACL), JFNA’s Center for Advancing Holocaust Survivor Care, and community-based health and supportive service providers to better address the unique needs of the country’s aging Holocaust survivor population. There are approximately 100,000 Holocaust survivors living in the United States today, with an estimated 30,000 living in poverty.

Holocaust survivors are an extremely vulnerable population, whose traumatic experiences during their childhood at the hands of the Nazis (and for many also under the former Soviet Union) complicate their ability to seek, receive, and benefit from the critical supportive services they need as older adults. Through the immediate support for the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program, which emphasizes “person-centered, trauma-informed supportive services (PCTI),” we are helping to prevent the very issues Holocaust survivors should never have to face again — eviction, hunger, inadequate medical care, loneliness, social isolation, and despair.

Current Status: The Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program was first created in the FY 2015 budget and has continued in each fiscal year through FY 2018. Funded in the first three cycles at $2.5 million annually, Congress doubled the program’s funding to $5 million in FY 2018, in response JUF and JFNA’s advocacy. The President’s FY 2019 Budget request includes no funding for this program. House and Senate Appropriators are in the process of developing their funding bills for FY 2019, which is why the timing of this request is urgent.

National Justification: Understanding trauma can help providers better manage risk. As a matter of public health, new approaches need to be developed and implemented to reduce the impact of trauma on individuals and to build the capacity of providers to be informed and trained in the practice of trauma-informed approaches. The timing is particularly acute for Holocaust survivors who will require greater services to meet their complex needs as they become increasingly frail. Furthermore, the best practices and lessons learned through this initiative will foster broader applications for the Aging Services Network to respond to other traumatized populations, such as aging veterans, refugees, and first responders. This is also becoming increasingly imperative given that by 2029, 20 percent of the total U.S. population will be over the age of 65. Advancing innovations, teaching best practices, increasing capacity, and improving service delivery within the Aging Services Network is a priority of Older
Americans Act programs. The achievements of the Holocaust Survivor initiative can have a lasting impact on the country as the shift toward an increasingly older population endures.

With a modest federal investment of $7.5 million thus far over three years (FY2015 – FY 2017), a total of 42 organizations in 18 states supporting 55 programs in 34 communities have been funded through the Center. In just the first two years of service delivery the program has impacted approximately 16,400 individuals, including approximately 11,000 Holocaust survivors, 4,000 service providers, and 1,400 caregivers (often family members). Prioritizing this cost-effective, innovative initiative in FY 2019 will ensure that this important work continues to improve the lives of the survivor community, and other vulnerable populations that follow, through the development of innovative approaches that create safe environments, prevent re-traumatization, reduce social isolation, and improve health outcomes.

**State and Local Justification:** Based on research conducted by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, the Chicago metropolitan area is home to more than 6,000 Holocaust survivors, many of whom are poor and in poor health. Through the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program, CJE SeniorLife has received two 2-year grants to serve Chicago’s survivor community. These grants have enabled CJE to develop its Holocaust Community Services program, which currently reaches close to 2,000 of Chicago’s 6,000 survivors and provides monthly financial assistance for in-home care, medication and/or food to 1,100 of these survivors. The program promotes well-being in physical and emotional/mental health, increases service accessibility by bringing mental health and support services to survivors in their own language and locations, and provides PCTI-informed programs and services, such as community health education programming, in-home and community-based mental health counseling and clinical case-management, and isolation-reduction programs.

**Recommendation:** We urge Congress to continue to strongly support funding for ACL’s Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program in FY 2019 at the FY 2018 level of $5 million to ensure adequate resources to improve and expand services for Holocaust survivors, a vulnerable population that relies on this critical safety net program.

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Established in 1900, the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago supports a network of more than 70 health and social service agencies that assist over 500,000 Chicagoans of all faiths and millions of Jews in Israel and 70 countries around the world. JUF is the central planning and fundraising arm of Chicago’s Jewish community, allocating more than $150 million annually in support of vital programs that feed, clothe, house and otherwise aid those in greatest need. The Jewish Federations of North America represents 148 Jewish Federations and over 300 Network communities, which raise and distribute more than $2 billion annually for social welfare, social services and educational needs. The Federation movement, collectively among the top 10 charities on the continent, protects and enhances the well-being of Jews worldwide through the values of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), Tzedakah (charity and social justice) and Torah (Jewish learning).