April 26, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner  
Chair, Senate Committee on the Budget  
State Capitol Room 5019  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Budget Build Back Boldly Plan (BBB) – AARP Comments

Dear Senator Skinner:

On behalf of 3.3 million AARP members in California, I am writing to express our appreciation for, and to offer comment on the Senate’s Build Back Boldly Plan (BBB), which seeks to make significant investments in California’s future. We commend your leadership in authoring SB 95, which expanded supplemental paid sick leave for most California workers. There is much to celebrate in the plan, including your forward thinking on how to best utilize forthcoming American Rescue Plan monies (ARP) along with some new concepts that chart a promising path on housing and homelessness. We are thankful that the plan highlights an “Aging Package” that includes several AARP priorities, such as the permanent elimination of the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) 7% hours cut and the Aging & Disability Resource Connections. At the same time, we would like to point out a few missed opportunities. We urge you to consider these proposals as you finalize budget negotiations. AARP will send a separate letter with our suggestions on how to best use ARP funds.

AARP has developed a brief list of budget priorities for the 2021-22 fiscal year, but we also see several ideas in the BBB plan that AARP can support, at least in concept. This letter will begin with listing budget requests that we would like to see incorporated into the BBB plan, and we will then follow with the pieces from the BBB plan that align with AARP’s budget priorities.

Opportunities for Improvement in the BBB Plan

Caregiver Resource Centers (Department of Healthcare Services) – We urge the Budget Committee to fully fund the Caregiver Resource Centers’ budget request of $26 billion over
three years. In addition, AARP aligns itself with the Caregiver Resource Center’s letter of March 26, 2021, which suggests several usages of ARP funds to support their vital work.

**Master Plan for Aging:** The Master Plan for Aging is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for California to achieve the goals of a California for all ages and abilities, and to set an example for the rest of the nation. We were disappointed to see that the MPA was not mentioned in the BBB, and we ask that this 10-year, cutting edge plan be elevated as a priority by the Senate Budget Committee. Notably, but not exclusively, we want to highlight the importance of implementing these initial measures from the Governor’s 2021-22 Budget Proposal of January 6, 2021:

- Establish the position of Senior Advisor on Aging, Disability, and Alzheimer’s in the Governor’s office to advance cross-cabinet initiatives and partnerships.

- Allocate 5 million for implementation of the Master Plan for Aging (Department of Aging).

**Long-Term Services and Supports:**
AARP supports the Governor’s proposal to allocate $12.5 million for both 2021/22 and the first half of 2022/23 to expand Aging & Disability Resource Centers (Department of Aging). We urge the Senate Budget Committee to support the current request and then to enhance this request using ARP funds.

**Elimination of Suspensions:**
Because they weren’t explicitly called out among the “phony” program suspensions on page 4 of the BBB, we implore Senate Budget to consider putting an end to the annual, wasteful suspensions on Medi-Cal optional benefits, which include audiology and speech therapy services, incontinence creams and washes, optician/optical lab services, and podiatric services. In addition, AARP supports the Governor’s proposal for the 21/22 fiscal year to allocate $15.6 from the general fund to finance the extension of Medi-Cal optional benefits (DHCS).

We also request that other programs that have been threatened with elimination or suspensions just last year including Community-based Adult Services (CBAS), the Multi-Purpose Senior Services Program (MSSP) and the Caregiver Resource Centers be included in this effort to fully eliminate suspensions.

**Areas of Alignment**
As noted earlier, AARP appreciates that the BBB plan explicitly calls out the necessity of ending program suspensions on the IHSS 7% hours reduction and on the Aging & Disability Resource Connections. There is much alignment between the BBB plan and AARP priorities, which we list below.

**Long-Term Supports and Services**
AARP supports in concept a reform of the asset test for Medi-Cal eligibility, in order to expand access to long-term care and protect homes and other assets of low-income California families (BBB, Page 10). We would have to examine the exact text of the proposal before determining our position.

On Page 7, the BBB plan mentions the importance of providing “multi-year flexible funding for homelessness programs that serve populations that are served by programs such as Adult Protective Services.” AARP already supports the HomeSafe/APS proposal of $25 million from the general fund in the current year and $100 million per year on an ongoing basis for both long-term case management and lowering the age of adults served to 60, as well as expanding Home Safe and making it a permanent program.

**Food Security for low-income older adults**

Food assistance programs are mentioned on page 14 of the BBB. AARP has already stated its support for the allocation of $5.4 million to expand the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) and $5 million to launch new Farm Fresh to Seniors Program (AARP request).

In addition, as a member of the CA Food Policy Advocates, AARP and our partners have co-sponsored a one-time funding request for a $1 million investment for California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to design and integrate a user-centered, simplified CalFresh application for older adults and people with disabilities, in order to increase CalFresh enrollment (BBB Page 14).

AARP generally supports increased funding for senior nutrition programs and expansion of CalAIM meal-related benefits (BBB Page 15) but would need to see specific proposal before finalizing our position.

**Workforce**

AARP supports in concept the BBB proposal to double the Governor’s proposal for training geriatric health care providers, in order to diversify and expand the workforce (BBB page 14).

**Housing and Homelessness**

In principle, AARP could support the housing proposals listed on pages 6 through 8 of the BBB plan, notably the call for ending the homelessness crisis and increasing housing affordability, along with mentions of ADUs, land use, zoning, and adaptive reuse. We would have to examine the proposals in detail before we take a position.

AARP supports the Governor’s proposal to allocate $250 million in one-time funds to purchase and rehabilitate Adult Residential Facilities and Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly to increase housing options for older adults and persons with disabilities. This appears to align with some of the Housing and Homelessness proposals on pp 6-8 of the BBB Plan.
We appreciate your consideration of these budget requests, and will look for time on our calendars to discuss AARP’s positions with you directly.

If you have any questions about our budget requests, please contact Nina Weiler-Harwell, Ph.D., Associate State Director, at 916-556-3027 or nweiler@aarp.org.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Nancy McPherson
State Director

Cc:
Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins
Senator Jim Nielsen, Vice Chair, Senate Budget Committee
Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman, Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #3
Senator Melissa Melendez, Vice Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #3