

Ruthie and Connie LGBT Elder Americans Act

Summary

Endorsing Organizations: SAGE USA, National LGBTQ Task Force, National Center for Transgender Equality

The Problem:

The number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) older adults is estimated to double to 3 million by 2030. As with other marginalized communities, LGBT older adults face significant barriers and profound disparities that put them in great social need. The available research shows that LGBT elders have fewer sources of support as compared to their heterosexual peers; face higher poverty rates; and experience poor health and health access. In addition, many enter the aging system with the harmful physical and emotional health effects of having lived through a lifetime of discrimination. Because of these profound challenges, LGBT older adults require unique services and supports that are scarce and severely underfunded in every part of the country. Many live in areas that lack vital, LGBT-affirming services that can improve their economic security, social support, and overall health and well-being. Further, while many Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are willing to offer LGBT cultural competence training to their staff, very few offer LGBT-specific programs or outreach. Further, less than half report they would be able to offer or fund LGBT-specific services. Overall, there is insufficient research on the needs of LGBT older people, the programs that could reduce these disparities, and whether aging providers are effectively serving them.

The Solution:

As the country's leading vehicle for funding and delivering services to older adults nationwide, the Older Americans Act (OAA) holds enormous potential for LGBT elders. Through the OAA, Congress can decrease the isolation faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged LGBT older adults, improve their health, and increase their access to culturally competent services and supports. This bill does the following to achieve those outcomes:

1. Includes LGBT older adults as a "vulnerable population" with greatest economic and social need
2. Permanently establishes and continues to fund the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging, the country's first and only technical assistance resource center aimed at improving the quality of services and supports offered to LGBT older adults. The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging will provide critical information and tools on aging service providers, LGBT organizations, and LGBT older adults through: a comprehensive clearing house of online resources; a national in-person, cultural competence training program; and technical assistance that links service providers and older adults to available resources
3. Requires the Assistant Secretary of Aging to oversee data collection on LGBT older adults and their service needs, mandates data collection and analysis on the effectiveness of the state agencies on aging and the AAAs in targeting services to LGBT older adults, and requires the state agencies to establish a reporting system to collect and analyze data on discrimination against LGBT older adults in long-term care facilities
4. Prioritizes research and development grants for organizations working to improve LGBT health, long-term care needs, and access to culturally responsive services