



March 31, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
 Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
 Hubert H. Humphrey Building
 Independence Avenue, S.W.
 Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I write today on behalf of the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD), our members, and the seniors, family caregivers, and persons with disabilities they serve. As you know, NASUAD represents the 56 officially designated state and territorial agencies on aging that administer programs authorized by the Older Americans Act (OAA). Additionally, over two-thirds of our members are responsible for their state's Medicaid home and community based services (HCBS) waivers that serve older adults and individuals with disabilities. In accordance with the Department of Health and Human Services' request for nominations to the Advisory Panel on Outreach and Education (APOE), as published in the March 3, 2011 *Federal Register*, NASUAD respectfully nominates Irene Collins for APOE membership .

President
 Irene B. Collins
 Alabama

For the past eight years, Mrs. Collins has served on Alabama Governor Bob Riley's cabinet as Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS), and she continues to serve as Commissioner under Governor Robert Bentley. In this capacity, she oversees the agency's coordination of state and federal programs that serve older adults, and, increasingly, individuals with disabilities regardless of age; family caregivers; residents of long-term care facilities; and Alabamians receiving assistance under the state's Medicaid Elderly and Disabled Waiver.

Vice President
 James Toews
 Oregon

Treasurer
 Charles D. Johnson
 Illinois

Prior to joining ADSS, Mrs. Collins spent six years as the Executive Director of the Jefferson County Council on Aging, where she led the agency's efforts to enhance the quality of life for older adults through a community based system of long-term services and supports. In addition to her professional accomplishments within the state of Alabama, as the current President of NASUAD and member of several nationally-based professional organizations, Commissioner Collins plays an integral role both within the aging network and disability community.

Secretary
 Carol Sala
 Nevada

Immediate Past President
 Patricia A. Polansky
 New Jersey

Past President
 Kathy Leitch
 Washington

Throughout her career at the local, state, and national levels, Commissioner Collins has cultivated not only a subject matter expertise and complementary skill set in the field of aging, but has also obtained a unique perspective on several of the corollary programs and initiatives that are integral to serving older Alabamians, as well as the APOE. While working to promote the independence and dignity of Alabama's aging population through a coordinated system of quality services, Mrs. Collins has advanced the state's nationally-recognized approach to emergency preparedness planning; implemented innovative strategies to enhance Alabama's State Health Insurance Assistance Program; administered the state's cost-saving prescription drug partnership program; expanded Alabama's caregiver support demonstration program within the context of the Older Americans Act-created National Family Caregiver Support Program; and maintained responsive outreach and education strategies, such as the ADSS-administered Constituent Services initiative.

Regarding her efforts to implement statewide emergency and disaster preparedness planning, Commissioner Collins has worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of Alabama's older adults and individuals with disabilities, in part by overseeing the construction of 55 new senior centers and 20 new safe centers across the state, an accomplishment which received national attention when ADSS was awarded the Senior Citizens' Preparedness Award at the 2009 National Hurricane Conference. Her efforts to bring awareness to the importance of proper planning were further recognized in 2010, when she was one of thirty people in the nation appointed by FEMA Administrator David Paulson to serve on the FEMA National Advisory Council. In this role, she represents the special needs population and is leading national efforts to ensure that regional FEMA coordinators are in place to work directly with this population should a disaster take place.

In Alabama, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) is housed in ADSS, under the direction of Commissioner Collins. Within this structure, the SHIP program has flourished since the inception of Medicare Part D, achieving Medicare enrollment rates that have ranked fourth in the nation and first in the southeast; currently, there over 280 SHIP Community Resource Centers in Alabama. In 2010, the state's SHIP program doubled its workforce and increased its outreach, education, and enrollment activities by leveraging an AmeriCorps grant from the Governor's Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives. This project was implemented under Mrs. Collins' direction, and has been nationally recognized as a best practice model and innovative strategy.

Also administered statewide by ADSS is Alabama's state-funded prescription drug assistance program, SenioRx, which has generated more than \$200 million in total savings in prescription drug costs under Commissioner Collins' leadership. The program, which began in July of 2002, provides assistance for older Alabamians with chronic medical conditions who have no prescription insurance coverage and limited financial means to apply for drug assistance programs provided by pharmaceutical manufacturers.

Recognizing a need to advance the state's caregiving agenda, Commissioner Collins oversaw the development and implementation of Alabama's REACH Intervention Project, a three-year pilot program funded by the Administration on Aging that focused on serving the needs of Alabama's caregivers and their loved ones with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Since its completion, the successful project has received national attention; including being highlighted in *The Journal of the Society for Clinical Trials* in 2006, and earning ADSS the Rosalynn Carter Leadership in Caregiving Award in 2007. In February of 2009, Mrs. Collins helped author a REACH Translation paper that was subsequently published in that month's issue of *The Gerontologist*.

The REACH demonstration has proven to be a model for translating evidence-based research into an implemental program that successfully improves the lives of older adults and their caregivers, and the concept of Alabama's REACH Project has been carried over into the state's existing caregiver outreach initiative, the Alabama Cares Program. Created under Alabama's National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) allotment, the Alabama Cares Program offers support for caregivers across the state by furnishing Information, Assistance, Counseling, Respite, and Supplemental Services.

Under Commissioner Collins' tutelage, ADSS also administers a state program for Constituent Services, which is charged with addressing the needs and concerns of individuals who contact the agency requesting assistance. In 2010, Constituent Services responded to over 250 letters and phone calls, which frequently involved consumer or caregiver requests for financial planning assistance; caregiver

and respite information; help with Medicare eligibility and enrollment; and prescription medication assistance. In ensuring the efficacy of this statewide, responsive program, Mrs. Collins has necessarily developed a high level of institutional knowledge in the areas of interest to the state's consumers and their families.

While Commissioner Collins is clearly qualified to assume a membership position on the APOE, she is also willing to serve as a Panel member, and looking forward to the potential opportunity to do so. Her expertise in the fields of aging, public health, State Health Insurance Assistance Programs, and outreach and education, when combined with her dedication to improving the lives of the nation's most vulnerable citizens through public service, result in a rare combination of knowledge, experience, and insight that would benefit not only the Panel, but also those individuals in need of the APOE's guidance.

On behalf of NASUAD, thank you for your consideration of our nomination for appointment to the Advisory Panel on Outreach and Education, Commissioner of the Alabama Department on Senior Services, and current NASUAD Present, Mrs. Irene Collins. As requested, please see the attached curricula vitae for additional information regarding Commissioner Collins' experience. We look forward to future collaborations in positioning the APOE to reach its full potential in meeting the needs of America's evolving health care system.

Sincerely,



Martha A. Roherty
Executive Director

Enclosure

cc: Irene B. Collins
Charles D. Johnson
Jennifer B. Kordonski
Kathy Leitch
Patricia A. Polansky
Carol Sala
James Toews