

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF LOW-INCOME OLDER ADULTS.

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NSCLC, REP. GRIJALVA, AND ADVOCATES CALL FOR RESTORING SSI PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, DC -- At a Capitol Hill briefing, Rep. Raul M. Grijalva (D-AZ) announced that he is introducing a bill today that would restore some elements of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program to the same level as 41 years ago, something that the National Senior Citizens Law Center has long championed.

SSI provides subsistence-level income to adults with very limited financial resources who are either over age 65 or cannot perform substantial work because of a severe disability.

The Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act, sponsored by Rep. Grijalva, strengthens SSI by streamlining and updating the rules for eligibility and amount of benefits. Some processes have not been updated in the 41 years since SSI was signed into law.

“Today, far too many older adults and persons with disabilities who now receive SSI struggle to make ends meet,” said NSCLC Executive Director Paul Nathanson. “The bill will change rules that have made it difficult for them to survive.”

On the day he signed the program into law, President Nixon said that SSI “can mean a big step out of poverty and toward a life of dignity and independence.” However, mainly because many

aspects of the program have not kept up with inflation, older adults who rely on SSI for their income security are deeper in poverty than when the program started.

Currently, a rule that disregards the first \$20 of monthly income when determining someone's eligibility hasn't changed in 40 years. Someone receiving SSI cannot have more than \$2,000 in resources or savings and some may be ineligible for benefits for up to three years because of a harsh transfer penalty. In addition, SSI benefits are reduced from their already meager level if someone receives in-kind support and maintenance such as food and/or housing, even from a family member.

The bill addresses these issues and others. It expands the resource limit to \$10,000. It increases the general income disregard from \$20 to \$110, repeals the transfer penalty and also eliminates reductions in benefits for in-kind support and maintenance.

"This legislation is a giant step forward. We hope that many others in the House will join Rep. Grijalva as co-sponsors and help make these changes law," Nathanson said.

Others who spoke at the briefing included: Rep. Grijalva, National Hispanic Council on Aging President and CEO Yanira Cruz, Center for American Progress President Neera Tanden, The Arc Policy Advocate T.J. Sutcliffe, NSCLC Directing Attorney Gerald McIntyre and Whitman Walker Health's Staff Attorney Zoe Paolantonio.

Statements of support, a bill summary, fact sheet and press releases from the briefing participants will be available online after the briefing at www.NSCLC.org.

The National Senior Citizens Law Center is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to protect the rights of low-income older adults. Through advocacy, litigation, and the education and counseling of local advocates, we seek to ensure the health and economic security of those with limited income and resources, and to preserve their access to the courts. For more information, visit our Web site at www.NSCLC.org. Follow us on Twitter @NSCLC1.