WOMEN'S INSTITUTE FOR A SECURE RETIREMENT

April 4, 2002

The Honorable E. Clay Shaw, Chair
The Honorable Robert T. Matsui, Rnk.Mem.
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
2455 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Shaw and Matsui:

The Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER) is a non-profit organization that seeks to ensure that poverty among older women will be reduced by improving the opportunities for women to secure retirement benefits. *WISER* works with community based organizations, advocates and policymakers to provide a key link between federal policy and individual women.

We are gratified that you are introducing the Social Security Benefit Enhancements for Women Act of 2002 during this session to improve benefits for elderly women. While the provisions of H.R. 4069 are modest, the 120,000 older women who will become eligible for benefits or receive higher benefits are the women who are the most likely to live in poverty – widows, disabled widows and divorced women.

Poverty among the elderly has greatly declined over the last two decades, but older women living alone are particularly at risk. Today, nearly 60 percent of older women in America are single: 45.3 percent are widowed and 7 percent are divorced. In contrast, only 26 percent of elderly men are unmarried.

We are heartened that the introduction of H.R. 4069 may be the first step toward enhancing Social Security benefits to ensure the long-term economic security of American women. We urge your colleagues to support this bill to improve Social Security benefits for older widows, disabled widows and divorced spouses.

Sincerely,

Cindy Hounsell
Executive Director

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