



November 3, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Blunt and Ranking Members Mikulski and Murray:

On behalf of our two organizations, our respective members and the millions of seniors they serve nationwide, we want to express our sincere appreciation for your leadership and past support of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs. We also write to urge you to fund these programs at a total level of \$848.5 million in any final FY 2017 appropriations agreement. This represents a \$13.8 million increase in funding for congregate and home-delivered meals, and is the amount included in the House's Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill that passed out of Committee in July.

We make this request knowing that you are already aware of both the social and economic value that OAA Nutrition Programs provide for the more than 2.4 million seniors they serve each year. By providing nutritious meals, friendly visits, socialization opportunities, and safety and wellness checks each day, these programs enable independence for and improve the health of our nation's most vulnerable seniors. They also prevent unnecessary trips to the emergency room, reduce falls and hospital utilization, and delay or eliminate altogether the need for nursing home care, thus saving what has been estimated to be billions of dollars in Medicare and Medicaid expenses. In fact, a senior can be fed Meals on Wheels for an entire year for approximately the equivalent average cost of ten days in a nursing home or one day in a hospital.

As noted, we recognize and sincerely appreciate the past increases provided for OAA Nutrition Programs, including the more than \$20 million increase provided in FY 2016, but we need to go much further. Year after year, our programs serve fewer seniors and meals while the need and demand escalates at an unprecedented pace. This growing gap is due to declining public funding, stagnant private funding, and rising food and transportation costs. Since 2005, the OAA nutrition network has served 23 million fewer meals, all while waiting lists continue to mount in every state. We must at a minimum stave off this continuous decline. An increase in funding for the congregate and home-delivered meals programs would prevent further erosion of service in FY 2017.

As you work with your colleagues to craft a final FY 2017 appropriations agreement, we again ask that you fund the OAA Nutrition Programs at the levels provided in the House's Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill, a total of \$848.5 million. With more than 12,000 seniors turning 60 every day and reaching the eligibility age for OAA programs, now is the time to boost investments in these proven and cost-effective programs.

Again, we thank you for your continued leadership and support for these programs and the seniors they serve.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
National Association of Nutrition and
Aging Services Programs (NANASP)



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Cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee