



September 17, 2019

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education & Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Committee on Education & Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights
& Human Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Honorable James Comer
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights
& Human Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, Chairwoman Bonamici and Ranking Member Comer:

On behalf of Meals on Wheels America, the nationwide network of community-based senior nutrition programs and the seniors they serve, thank you for your bipartisan leadership and committed efforts to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). We write to express our support for H.R. 4334, the Dignity in Aging Act of 2019, and commend the introduction of this legislation by Subcommittee Chairwoman Bonamici (D-OR) and Ranking Member Comer (R-KY), and Representatives Stefanik (R-NY), Lee (D-NV), Wild (D-PA) and Johnson (R-SD).

For over five decades, the OAA has been the primary piece of federal legislation focused on establishing, coordinating and strengthening community and home-based social and nutrition services for adults age 60 and older, their families and their caregivers. OAA services like Meals on Wheels, transportation, caregiver assistance, senior employment and training and elder rights protection are just some of the vital functions the OAA delivers to more than 11 million seniors annually.

As you know firsthand, OAA services and supports, including the three nutrition programs authorized under Title III of the Act, help keep our nation's most vulnerable, isolated and food insecure seniors healthier and in their own homes and communities longer, thereby delaying and/or preventing altogether the need for more expensive institutional care often paid for through Medicare or Medicaid. OAA programs are not only extremely cost-effective, but they are longstanding and successful examples of public-private partnerships that help save taxpayers at the local, state and federal levels in reduced healthcare expenditures.

To that end, we specifically want to recognize and commend the effort undertaken to increase authorization of appropriations in this legislation. We understand the fiscal challenges and the difficult decisions Members of Congress must make regarding the federal budget, and we appreciate these investments that are necessary to meet the demands and needs of a growing

population of seniors threatened by hunger and isolation. With nearly half of our membership having a documented waiting list for nutrition services, the 7% increase in authorization of funding levels in Fiscal Year 2020 – and 6% in subsequent years for all OAA programs over the five-year reauthorization period – will significantly improve the senior nutrition network’s ability to address these gaps.

We also applaud the attention to and need for additional research and innovation established through a new National Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation Center for aging services research and development. We already know the difference that OAA services and supports are making in the lives of those served each day, and this additional support will help identify where the greatest needs and opportunities are to produce substantial savings to Medicare and Medicaid and support our nation’s most at-risk seniors.

Furthermore, we are grateful for the *Dignity in Aging Act’s* acknowledgement of the components of our network’s comprehensive service model, particularly around the areas of social isolation and loneliness; in-home safety; screenings and prevention; and community connections and support. For more than 50 years, this network has been addressing the Social Determinants of Health for seniors long before Social Determinants of Health was a common definition used among policymakers, advocates and healthcare entities. Thanks to the foresight of this body in establishing the OAA Nutrition Program and its goals and purposes decades ago, the focus has transcended beyond just the meal to include an emphasis on socialization, overall health, well-being and safety.

As with each reauthorization, we have a new opportunity to evolve the OAA in ways that will help it better meet the inherent changes in our country’s aging population and serve more of those in need. We are pleased that H.R. 4334, the Dignity in Aging Act of 2019, helps to address these shifts, and as such, we urge swift passage out of the Committee. Meals on Wheels America and the network of senior nutrition programs across the county have appreciated working alongside you and your staff to provide feedback and policy recommendations throughout this reauthorization process. We look forward to continuing to do so in the days and weeks ahead and to ensure that a strong, bipartisan bill passes the House and the Senate, and is ultimately signed into law by the President.

Thank you again for your leadership, public service and support for our nation’s older adults.

Sincerely,



Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America