



February 22, 2018

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

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
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 Leahy and Murray:

On behalf of our two organizations, our respective members and the millions of seniors they serve nationwide, we thank you for your continued leadership and longstanding support of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs. As you finalize appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 under the terms of the Bipartisan Budget Act, we have a specific ask.

We urge you to provide a \$150 million increase over FY 2017 enacted levels for OAA Nutrition Programs, for a total of \$987.7 million in funding for FY 2018. This is a unique opportunity to build on the bipartisan, bicameral support that exists for these programs by providing this long-overdue increase, while at the same time improving the lives of your most vulnerable senior constituents and reducing healthcare expenditures by providing the basic living need of nutrition, promoting wellness and enabling independence at home.

We make this necessary request knowing that you are aware of both the social and economic value that OAA Nutrition Programs provide for the 2.4 million seniors they serve each year, including seniors in each of your states, and the growing unmet need as a result of a rapidly aging population that is increasingly struggling with hunger and malnutrition. By delivering daily nutritious meals, opportunities for socialization and safety checks, these programs produce concrete results and save significant taxpayer dollars by preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency room, admissions and readmissions to hospitals and delaying or eliminating altogether the need for nursing home care. In short, OAA Nutrition Programs save money and lives.

The last time there was an opportunity such as this to increase funding for OAA Nutrition Programs was in 2009, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. That is when OAA Nutrition Programs received a \$100 million increase in recognition of their impact and value. Sadly, this funding level was reduced the next year and has declined in value since then. Yet, the number of seniors in need of nutrition services has only escalated, leaving a huge unfilled gap: the OAA network overall is serving 19 million fewer meals to seniors in need than it was in 2005.

To that end, a 2015 Government Accountability Office report found that 83% of food insecure seniors and 83% of physically-impaired seniors did not receive meals through the OAA, but likely needed them. In fact, today one in four Meals on Wheels programs report having a waiting list. And, there is no end in sight with 12,000 seniors turning 60 every day and reaching eligibility age for OAA services. We must turn the tide to address this national crisis, and you are in the position to do just that.

We again make the case that increasing funding for senior nutrition programs delivers a powerful return to seniors and taxpayers alike. **OAA Nutrition Programs currently take up less than one-tenth of one percent of the total discretionary budget;** meanwhile, Medicare and Medicaid costs climb year over year. But, providing meals designed specifically for seniors' nutritional needs can change this. For example, Meals on Wheels' clients report fewer falls, which cost our nation \$31 billion annually in direct Medicare expenses. Medicaid spends \$54.8 billion annually on nursing home care; with more funding for meals, more seniors can remain at home, which will drive this cost down significantly.

As your Committee and Subcommittee work to finalize appropriations for the remainder of the fiscal year, we strongly request that you fund the OAA Nutrition Programs at the level of \$987.7 million. Now is the time to boost investments in these programs that day after day deliver results for seniors, and ultimately save money for the American taxpayer.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
National Association of Nutrition and
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Cc: Senate Appropriations Committee Members