



May 24, 2017

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 sincerely thank you for your leadership and longstanding support of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs, including the \$3 million increase provided in the FY 2017 Omnibus Appropriations Bill.

It is in that spirit that we urge you to build on the bipartisan, bicameral support that exists for these programs and to fund them at a total level of \$874.6 million in FY 2018. This represents the authorized funding levels for the Congregate, Home-Delivered and Nutrition Services Incentive Programs as unanimously approved by Congress and signed into law last year.

We also respectfully request that you maintain the existing funding level of \$1.7 billion for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), which includes about \$30 million for congregate and home-delivered meals. As you know, the President's Budget would eliminate all funding for SSBG. Similarly, two other block grants proposed for elimination, the Community Development and Community Services Block Grants (CDBG and CSBG, respectively), also provide important funding for senior nutrition. We urge at least level funding for these important programs.

We make this request knowing that you are already acutely aware of both the social and economic value that OAA Nutrition Programs provide for the millions of seniors they serve each year. By delivering nutritious meals, friendly visits, and safety and wellness checks each day, these programs produce concrete results: they are enabling independence and improving the health of our nation's most vulnerable. At the same time, they are saving significant taxpayer dollars and reducing healthcare expenditures by preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency room, admissions and readmissions to hospitals and delaying or eliminating altogether the need for nursing home care. As an example, Meals on Wheels' clients report fewer falls, which cost our nation \$31 billion annually in direct Medicare expenses.

OAA congregate and home-delivered meal programs are serving every state and congressional district in this nation. More than 2.4 million seniors receive nutritious meals every year, each meal representing half or more of

their total daily food intake. Those served often have multiple chronic conditions, take six or more medications daily and are functionally impaired. In addition, they are primarily women, 76 and older, who live alone. Significant numbers live in rural areas, are living in poverty and belong to a minority group. In short, OAA Nutrition Programs are effectively reaching our most vulnerable, at-risk seniors.

For both congregate and home-delivered clients, the companionship provided is critical to reducing isolation, which, as with a nutritious meal, is vitally important to health and quality of life. Seniors at a congregate program, for example, have a daily opportunity for socialization with their peers, preventing isolation. For home-delivered meal recipients, the volunteer or staff member delivering the meal may be the only person they see all day. These programs continue to meet Congress' intent and the exact purposes as outlined in the OAA by addressing the unique social and nutritional needs of seniors.

As noted earlier, we recognize and sincerely appreciate the past increases provided for OAA Nutrition Programs but know we need to go much further. Year after year, our programs are serving fewer seniors and meals while the need and demand is escalating 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. And, increasing funding for the congregate and home-delivered meals programs in FY 2018 would prevent further erosion of service at a time when the need has never been greater.

As your Committee and Subcommittee craft and consider the FY 2018 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill, we again ask that you fund the OAA Nutrition Programs at the level of \$874.6 million while maintaining existing funding levels for SSBG, CDBG and CSBG. With more than 10,000 seniors turning 65 every day, now is the time to boost investments in these proven and cost-effective programs.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues throughout the FY 2018 appropriations process.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director
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cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee