



November 15, 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 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, we ask you to consider the growing number of seniors who are waiting for nutritious meals, but cannot receive them due to stagnant funding and rising food and transportation costs.

Between now and the December 8 deadline, **we urge you to build on the bipartisan, bicameral support that exists for OAA Nutrition 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 provide level funding for the Social Services, Community Development and Community Services Block Grants,** which provide a flexible and foundational funding source for many senior nutrition programs, in order to help meet the growing demand and need.

We make these requests knowing that you are aware of both the social and economic value that OAA Nutrition Programs provide for 2.4 million seniors they serve each year. By delivering nutritious meals, opportunities for socialization, and safety and wellness checks each day, 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. As an example, Meals on Wheels' clients report fewer falls, which cost our nation \$31 billion annually in direct Medicare expenses. In short, OAA Nutrition Programs are enabling independence and improving the health of our nation's most vulnerable – seniors who are primarily women, age 76 and older, live alone, have multiple chronic conditions, take six or more medications daily and/or are functionally impaired.

For both congregate and home-delivered meal recipients, the companionship provided through these programs is critical to reducing isolation, which, along with a nutritious meal, is vitally important to health and quality of life. In a recent NANASP study, seniors who said that socialization is encouraged at their congregate programs were

also four times as likely to say they had knowledge of good nutrition, had knowledge of healthy eating habits and had experienced improved physical health since coming to the site. For home-delivered meal recipients, the volunteer or staff member delivering the meal may be the only person they see all day. Overall, these programs continue to meet the exact purposes of the OAA as outlined in the Act by addressing the unique social and nutritional needs of seniors.

However, year after year, our programs are serving fewer seniors and meals while the need and demand are escalating at an unprecedented pace. Since 2005, the OAA nutrition network has served 19 million fewer meals, all while 1 in 4 programs report having a waiting list for nutrition services today. Further challenging the growing unmet need are the recent hurricanes and wildfires that have taken their toll on programs in Florida, Texas and California. We call on you and your colleagues to at a minimum stave off this decline and prevent further erosion of service at a time when the need has never been greater.

As your Committee and Subcommittee work to finalize the FY 2018 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill for the remainder of the fiscal year, 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. In addition, we urge Congress to take the time between now and the new December deadline to develop and negotiate a bipartisan budget agreement that eliminates the threat of sequestration in 2018 and raises the budget caps that continue to squeeze so many discretionary programs. With more than 12,000 seniors turning 60 every day and reaching the eligibility age for OAA services, now is the time to boost investments in these proven and cost-effective programs.

Sincerely,



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



Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America

Contact Information:
1612 K Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006
202-682-6899
www.nanasp.org

Contact Information:
1550 Crystal Drive, Suite 1004
Arlington, VA 22202
703-548-5558
www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org