



May 10, 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:

First, we sincerely thank you for your leadership and support of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs, including the more than \$20 million increase provided in FY 2016. 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 \$848.5 million in FY 2017. This is the amount requested by the President and includes a \$13.8 million increase in funding for congregate and home-delivered meals. In addition, we support the Administration's request for an additional \$10 million for OAA home and community-based supportive services.

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 are enabling independence and improving the health of our nation's most vulnerable. At the same time, they are saving significant taxpayer dollars by preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency room, reducing falls and hospital utilization, and delaying or eliminating altogether the need for nursing home care.

OAA congregate and home-delivered meals programs are serving every state and congressional district in this nation. More than 2.4 million seniors received nutritious meals in 2013, 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, age 75 or older, and living 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, we are serving 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 21 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.

We know that access to OAA meals is essential to keeping seniors out of costly nursing facilities and hospitals, thus saving what has been estimated to be billions of dollars in Medicare and Medicaid expenses. 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. However, the full extent of the cost savings to Medicare and Medicaid has never been evaluated. Given the magnitude of potential savings, we call on you to have the Congressional Budget Office and/or the Department of Health and Human Services conduct a study on precisely how much OAA Nutrition Programs do in fact save Medicare and Medicaid.

As your Committee and Subcommittee craft and consider the FY 2017 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill, we again ask that you fund the OAA Nutrition Programs at the level 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.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues throughout the FY 2017 appropriations process.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
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