

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

[[DATE]]

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations,  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Shelby, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger,

Thank you for your ongoing support for programs and services that are critical to the health and well-being of older adults across our nation. We appreciate the modest increases in funding for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs included in the respective Senate and House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bills. With the historic aging of our nation's population and the surge in demand for services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased funding for OAA programs is particularly important now and in the years to come. As you continue to negotiate and develop the Fiscal Year 2023 omnibus appropriations bill (FY23 omnibus), we urge you to prioritize larger and more sustained investments in nutrition services for older adults by including \$1.933 billion for OAA Title III Nutrition Services in the final bill.

For more than 50 years, OAA programs and services – including nutrition programs authorized under Title III-C – have advanced the health and well-being of older adults. They provide millions of American seniors, many of whom are low-income and belong to other underserved populations, the services necessary to reduce hunger and isolation while maintaining their dignity, health, and independence. The nutrition services provided through Title III-C of OAA enable seniors to live in their own homes and maintain consistent social interaction.

Unfortunately, stubbornly high food costs and a shortage of available volunteers have prevented service providers, despite their best efforts, from being able to fulfill existing needs. We continue to speak with nutrition service providers in our states and districts who tell us that their programs and staff members are stretched beyond their capacity. Around the country, programs providing

congregate and home delivered meals to older adults are deficit spending each month, experiencing growing waiting lists, and facing shortages of available volunteers to support their operations.

“We’re battling a new obstacle on top of COVID in 2022—inflation and its impact on our food and fuel costs. Our fuel costs alone for our fleet of delivery vehicles have increased by 33 percent and our food costs have gone up by 25 percent. This equates to more than \$200,000 in unanticipated costs we must make up.”—Meals on Wheels San Francisco, CA

“We are \$8,000-\$10,000 over budget every month and draining all of our resources to just keep up with rising costs. Our program cannot sustain this much longer and are currently forecasting a \$40,000 deficit in our next fiscal year if we cannot get more funding.”—Gladwin Council on Aging, MI

“Our 2022 wages are an average of more than 15 percent higher than in 2021. Food costs are significantly higher this year as well and many items are still out of stock. Gas costs are affecting both our bottom line and our volunteer drivers, many of whom are no longer able to deliver for us without mileage reimbursement.”—Whatcom Council on Aging, WA

“Squeezed by 70 percent increased need, the Meals on Wheels program in the capital city of Vermont is facing a financial deficit of 78 percent because of the static level of OAA funding. We’ve had to start a waitlist, putting folks who deserve vital nutrition in limbo. Simply put, we receive \$3.80 for each meal we serve but our cost is actually \$17 per meal, which we are struggling to finance.” – Montpelier Senior Activity Center, VT

Data from the United States Department of Agriculture show that the cost of groceries has grown by 13 percent over the last year and may increase by an additional 10 percent next year.<sup>[1]</sup> Although inflation has forced many American families to reconfigure their monthly budgets, older adults, particularly those who are vulnerable or underserved, are disproportionately affected by high food costs. The September 2022 National Poll on Healthy Aging shows that three-quarters of people between the ages of 50 and 80 in the United States are affected somewhat or a lot by the rising cost of groceries. More than 50 percent of older adults in fair or poor mental health are eating less healthy because of cost, while nearly half of older adults in fair or poor physical health or with an annual household income of less than \$30,000 are less able or likely to maintain a healthy diet.<sup>[2]</sup>

“We have never seen the number of older people turning to us saying they have no food and no money. Over the past 3 years our clients have increased by 57 percent and our meals have increased by 53 percent. The causes for these increases are related to COVID and the dramatic increase in food and labor costs. In just this past year, our contracted

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/poll-extras/rising-food-prices-hit-less-healthy-older-adults-hardest-poll-suggests>

meal costs went from \$3.572 to \$3.918, a difference of \$0.35 per meal. For the 1.5 million meals we project to serve in FY 2023, that equates to an additional \$525,000! The urgency is very real.”—Meals on Wheels of Tarrant County, TX

“Older adults were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, often unable to access food and groceries when transportation, quarantines, and technology became barriers. Right on the heels of that crisis, they face inflation in food and other costs on fixed and very limited budgets. The end result is devastating. The older adults we are hearing from in Ohio and Kentucky are very scared. They are in incredibly vulnerable positions, in need of multiple supports, and caught in a perfect storm. They are the crisis in aging personified.” —Meals on Wheels of Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky, OH and KY

“The number of calls we get in a day from people who are seeking food assistance has nearly tripled. We’re feeding more seniors than we ever have before because more seniors are accessing services because they’re running out of money. COVID really helped to expose the vulnerability of our safety net in our state and in our country. And then you put on top of that inflation, inflation in fuel and inflation in rent prices, and it creates a crisis.”—Open Hand Atlanta, GA

“We serve approximately 2,500 Southern Nevada Seniors each day with the life changing Meals on Wheels resources, while continuing to struggle to fund a multi-million-dollar revenue shortfall each year. As other organizations are likely experiencing, our waitlist for services has grown, coupled with rising food costs and a challenging supply chain and product availability, while government revenue streams have remained basically flat with no inflationary increases from our government funding. These unprecedented challenges also place additional pressure on our operating and development teams to care for the growing number of vulnerable seniors who suffer in silence with poor nutrition and food insecurity without these critical Meals on Wheels resources.”—Catholic Charities of Southern NV, NV

Demand for OAA services is only expected to increase in the years to come. Today, there are more than 77 million Americans aged 60 years and older, the largest cohort of seniors in American history.<sup>[3]</sup> The U.S. Census projects that these trends will continue for the next few decades, and by 2050, the number of Americans aged 60 years and older will increase to more than 108 million.<sup>[4]</sup> Doubling funding over the Fiscal Year 2022 enacted level for OAA Title III nutrition programs will provide relief, peace of mind, and much-needed financial stability to service providers and seniors.

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[3]

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S0102%3A%20POPULATION%2060%20YEARS%20AND%20OVER%20IN%20THE%20UNITED%20STATES&g=0100000US&tid=ACST1Y2021.S0102>

[4] <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1145-supplemental-tables.pdf>

The additional investments we request will enable service providers, including those whose stories we share in this letter, to account for rising food costs, shorten their waiting lists by serving more seniors, and implement plans to adequately address current and future need in their respective communities. Further, investing in OAA services saves taxpayer dollars by reducing premature and costly Medicare and Medicaid expenditures resulting from unnecessary nursing home placement or hospitalizations due to poor nutrition and chronic health conditions.

It is for these reasons that we respectfully request the FY23 omnibus include \$1.933 billion for OAA Title III Nutrition programs. These vital OAA services fulfill our nation's commitment to supporting the right of all people to live independently and age with dignity, regardless of income or location. Thank you.

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[[SIGNATURES]]

CC: Chair Patty Murray, Ranking Member Roy Blunt, Ranking Member Tom Cole