



October 28, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education & Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Committee on Education & Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

On behalf of Meals on Wheels America, the nationwide network of community-based senior nutrition programs and the individuals they serve, we write to express our support for H.R. 4334, the Dignity in Aging Act of 2019 and urge swift and bipartisan passage in the House of Representatives. We commend the efforts of the Education and Labor Committee for receiving unanimous approval following the September markup, as well as the leadership of Subcommittee Chairwoman Bonamici (D-OR) and Ranking Member Comer (R-KY), and Representatives Stefanik (R-NY), Lee (D-NV), Wild (D-PA) and Johnson (R-SD) in the introduction of this legislation.

For over five decades, the OAA has been the primary piece of federal legislation focused on establishing, coordinating and strengthening community and home-based social and nutrition services for adults age 60 and older, their families and their caregivers. OAA services like Meals on Wheels, transportation, caregiver assistance, senior employment and training and elder rights protection are just some of the vital functions the OAA delivers to more than 11 million seniors annually.

As you and many of your colleagues know firsthand, OAA services and supports, including the three nutrition programs authorized under Title III of the Act, help keep our nation's most vulnerable, isolated and food insecure seniors healthier and in their own homes and communities longer. This in turn delays and/or prevents altogether the need for more expensive institutional care often paid for through Medicare or Medicaid. OAA programs are not only extremely cost-effective, but they are longstanding examples of public-private partnerships that help save taxpayers at the local, state and federal levels in reduced healthcare expenditures.

We specifically want to recognize the effort undertaken to increase authorization of appropriations in this legislation. With nearly half of our membership having a documented waiting list for nutrition services, the 7% increase in authorization of funding levels in Fiscal Year 2020 – and 6% in subsequent years for all OAA programs over the five-year reauthorization period – will significantly improve the senior nutrition network's ability to address these gaps.

We also applaud the attention to and inclusion of additional research and innovation established through a new National Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation Center for aging services research and development. We already know the difference that OAA services and supports are making in the lives of those served each day, and this additional support will help identify where the greatest needs and opportunities are to produce substantial savings to Medicare and Medicaid and support our nation's most at-risk seniors.

Furthermore, we are grateful for the *Dignity in Aging Act's* acknowledgement of the components of our network's comprehensive service model, particularly around the areas of social isolation and loneliness; in-home safety; screenings and prevention; and community connections and support. This network has been addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH) for seniors long before it was a common definition used among policymakers, advocates and healthcare entities. Thanks to the foresight of this body in establishing the OAA Nutrition Program and its goals and purposes decades ago, the focus has transcended beyond just the meal to include an emphasis on socialization, overall health, well-being and safety.

As with each reauthorization, we have a new opportunity to evolve the OAA in ways that will help it better meet the inherent changes in our country's aging population and serve more of those in need. We are pleased that H.R. 4334, the Dignity in Aging Act of 2019, helps to address these shifts, and as such, we urge your support and swift passage in the House of Representatives. Meals on Wheels America and the network of senior nutrition programs across the country have appreciated contributing feedback and policy recommendations throughout this reauthorization process and look forward to continuing to work with you to build upon the ongoing successes of the OAA.

Thank you again for your leadership, public service and support for our nation's older adults.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Ellie Hollander". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ellie Hollander
President and CEO