



April 30, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Scalise
Minority Whip
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer, Leader McCarthy and Whip Scalise:

We write to you today on behalf of our two organizations and the nationwide network of congregate and home-delivered senior nutrition programs we represent, as well as the millions of vulnerable seniors who rely on and are in need of nutritious meals and wellness checks to reduce hunger, isolation and improve their overall health. These local programs serve nearly every community across the country and are working tirelessly on the frontlines to ensure America's seniors – those who remain at greatest risk during this COVID-19 national emergency – receive the vital nutrition services and supports they need now. Post-pandemic, access to these life-sustaining services will continue to be both a social and economic imperative for a growing number of vulnerable older adults.

We want to again acknowledge and express our deep appreciation to you and your colleagues for providing emergency funds and key policy changes for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs in both the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020, including a total of \$750 million for OAA Congregate, Home-Delivered and Native American Nutrition Services. The supplemental funding and emergency flexibilities help nutrition programs in every state and district to adapt to their community's specific and most pressing needs amidst the ever-changing situation brought on by COVID-19.

There is still more work to be done to guarantee that seniors, their families and caregivers – and the nonprofit community that serves them – are adequately protected and supported as our nation moves either from response to recovery or prepares for the next wave. As such, we urge Congress to consider the following recommendations in the next relief and response package:

Further Fund Older Americans Act Programs

Provide \$250 million in additional funding for Home-Delivered Nutrition Services and increase funding for other key Older Americans Act (OAA) programs.

Congress provided much-needed funding for some OAA programs, including the congregate and home-delivered nutrition programs. However, we remain concerned that without increased federal resources, senior nutrition programs will be unable to serve the huge influx of new clients and need for meals that has come with the pandemic. Even before COVID-19, programs in every state had waiting lists for regular services and 83% of low-income, food insecure seniors were not receiving the meals they needed. We also support additional funding for related OAA programs, including \$50 million for the Title III-D health promotion and disease prevention services program and \$80 million for the Title III-B supplemental services program, both of which have experienced significant changes in their provision of important services.

Expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Increase the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) maximum benefit by 15 percent and minimum monthly benefit from \$16 to \$30 through the duration of the health and economic crisis and ensure access to benefits for homebound individuals.

As a growing number of older adults struggle with hunger and access to food during the pandemic and throughout the related economic crisis, it is critical that federal anti-hunger programs are expanded to address the need in communities, and that homebound individuals can appropriately utilize their SNAP benefits for grocery delivery. SNAP is the largest federal nutrition program and thus plays a key role in addressing the unique health and social needs of low income, older adults. As SNAP provides a proven economic benefit through direct revenue to stores and helps maintain local jobs, the program remains essential during this public health pandemic and related economic crisis. Furthermore, we urge suspension of all rulemaking that would restrict SNAP eligibility and reduce benefits.

Support the Charitable, Nonprofit Sector

Strengthen charitable giving incentives and expand access to credit for all nonprofit charitable organizations.

Local senior nutrition programs are long-standing examples of successful public-private partnerships. Although federal funding is an irreplaceable component, home-delivered and congregate meal providers also must rely on private donations and grants to deliver vital nutrition and social supports to our nation's at-risk older adults. We appreciate steps taken through the FFCRA and the CARES Act to provide nonprofit relief; however, additional action is needed to help ensure nonprofits can maintain their operations. Among these actions are allowing adjustments to 2019 tax filings, improving the above-the-line deduction provided in the CARES Act by increasing the \$300 per person cap, and increasing charitable mileage deductions for volunteers to be on par with business rates.

Invest in the Social Services Block Grant

Increase funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) to \$4.1 billion, with a 5-percent set aside for Tribes.

SSBG provides unique and crucial funding for states and communities to respond to the needs of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, including funds for congregate and home-delivered meal programs. Many senior nutrition programs leverage funds through SSBG to address the unique nutritional, social, financial and health-related needs of at-risk older adults. SSBG funds additionally allow for other critical services for older adults including adult protective services, adult day services, in-home supportive services, and case management, and has been proven to be a key source of support for states and communities to respond to disasters and manage surges in need, which will remain essential throughout response and recovery from this pandemic.

Essential Services Designation

Ensure that senior nutrition program staff, volunteers and vendors supporting their operations are considered part of the essential services workforce.

Though many states and localities do consider home-delivered meals providers, other senior nutrition providers, and their vendors "essential" members of the workforce, some providers and vendors have had trouble getting this designation. These providers and vendors have faced trouble obtaining food and other necessities for the older adults they serve. We urge Congress to take action to ensure that nutrition providers and their vendors are considered "essential" nationwide, which would allow these providers to continue their work uninterrupted.

Access to Personal Protective Equipment

Ensure an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for senior nutrition program staff, volunteers and other aging network stakeholders.

Personal protective equipment, or PPE—such as gloves, masks, hand sanitizers, and cleaning products—is in short supply across the United States. Access to PPE is most often thought of as a frontline healthcare issue, but it is also essential for ensuring the safety of the older clients served by the senior

nutrition network and the staff and volunteers who support them. We urge all policymakers to take any steps possible to obtain PPE for all groups who need it, including and especially senior nutrition programs.

As Congress continues its work to address the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, we stand ready and look forward to working together to ensure that our nation's seniors are not left behind. We thank you for your continued commitment to funding and supporting the programs and services that are there when our seniors are scared and have no one else to turn to for help.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
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cc: House Committee on Appropriations