



April 24, 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Rogers and Cole and Ranking Members Lowey and DeLauro:

First, we sincerely thank you for your leadership and past support of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs, especially in FY 2014 when you provided FY 2012 funding levels, effectively restoring cuts previously imposed by sequestration. It is in that spirit that we urge you to support a funding level of \$874.6 million for these vital programs in FY 2016. This is the amount requested by the President and includes a \$40 million increase in funding for congregate and home-delivered meals, as well as \$20 million for new evidence-based demonstration grants.

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 all together the need for nursing home care.

OAA congregate and home-delivered meals programs are serving every state and congressional district in this nation. Nearly 2.5 million seniors received nutritious meals in 2012, each meal representing half or more of their total daily food intake. Those served have multiple chronic conditions, take six or more medications daily and are functionally impaired. In addition, the majority are women who are 75 and 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 meals 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 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 17 million fewer meals all while waiting lists continue to mount in every state. This troubling trend will undoubtedly be even greater once the data from 2013—the year of sequestration—is released.

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 2016. And, supporting the President's proposed \$20 million for evidence-based demonstration grants for OAA Nutrition Programs would help foster innovation and help bring to scale many of the current creative and cost-effective practices being employed across the country.

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 a week 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 you determine the FY 2016 spending levels, we implore you to avoid any return to sequestration funding levels for our programs. When sequestration was imposed in March 2013, our programs were hit especially hard. This included the need to initiate waiting lists, reduce days and number of meals served, and in some cases, close sites altogether. Thankfully, you recognized the deleterious impact that these reductions had on your constituents and responded with increased funding for FY 2014. Our most vulnerable seniors, our families, our communities, and taxpayers as a whole simply cannot afford a second round of sequestration.

As your Committee and Subcommittee crafts and considers the FY 2016 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill, we again ask that you fund the OAA Nutrition Programs at the level of \$874.6 million. With more than 12,000 seniors turning 60 every day and reaching the eligibility age for OAA programs, now is the time to provide a greater investment 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 2016 appropriations process.

Sincerely,



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



Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America

Cc: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies

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