



November 14, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
United State Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Murray and Baldwin, Vice Chair Collins and Ranking Member Moore Capito:

As federal funding for FY 2024 is being finalized, **we urgently request a minimum allocation of \$1,284,385,000 for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III-C Nutrition Program within the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill.** This program, backed by a history of bipartisan support, fosters a successful public-private partnership that enables the delivery of more than 251 million nutritious meals annually to older adults facing hunger and isolation and is deserving of increased federal resources this year.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, Congress recognized the inherent value and necessity of these nutrition and socialization services and subsequently enacted \$1.6 billion in supplemental emergency funding for OAA nutrition providers to be able to meet the demand and address new challenges and those exacerbated by the pandemic. Without a funding level of \$1.284 billion in FY 2024, however, thousands of older adults will certainly fall victim to a funding cliff and reduced access to the meals and companionship they urgently need.

Research has demonstrated the positive impacts of OAA congregate and home-delivered meals on the health and well-being of older adults while also resulting in cost savings for taxpayers. Yet, these evidence-based programs require sufficient funding to fulfill their mission to reach older adults in the greatest social and economic need. As is, local programs report that:

- 73% are facing higher demand for home-delivered meals than before the pandemic.
- One in three has a waiting list, forcing seniors to wait, on average, three months for vital meals.
- 97% believe there are seniors in their community who need meals who they are not currently serving.
- 91% require increased funding to address inflation and rising costs.

The deep federal funding cuts being threatened in FY 2024 appropriations bills would cause further personal and direct harm to those older adults who rely on and need services. In fact, we receive numerous stories from programs across the nation highlighting the growing need in their communities, the failure of current funding to keep pace, and the dire consequences that federal spending cuts have already had on their programs and the individuals they serve. Below are a few examples:

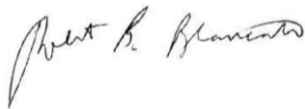
- **From Washington State, we heard...**
  - “As of today, we have over 800 clients (and counting) on our waitlist. We are not able to take on any new clients and when we tell them that we have an indefinite wait time, they respond that they will be dead. We need an increase of \$1.3 million annually to get rid of our waitlist.”
  - One local meal provider in the state reported having twice as many Meals on Wheels clients. Due to lack of funding, they have only been able to bring their congregate programs functioning at 50%.

- A congregate meal site in the state noted that their greatest challenge was lack of funding and are serving more than they did March 2020. They also added that once emergency SNAP and EBT benefits ended, they watched their numbers of clients drastically increase in their county.
- **From Maine, we heard...**
  - One local program expressed how their organization prides itself on not putting participants on a waiting list. They said, “funding cuts may mean putting people who need a meal NOW, on a waiting list. That would be heartbreaking to us.”
- **From Wisconsin, we heard...**
  - “Funding cuts will greatly impact the Black/African American Community in Milwaukee County. Since April of 2021, Milwaukee County ADS Senior Dining Program has partnered with 5 minority owned restaurants to provide culturally diverse meals to our participants. This partnership has attracted 568 diners who have never received a Title III Service. Of those new diners 488 or 86% were elders of color. Additionally, this program has paid over \$141,000 to these minority owned restaurants. A decrease in funding would most likely mean a need to cut those services, greatly impacting the community as a whole.”
- **From West Virginia, we heard...**
  - One organization reported an average 12% increase in food costs for congregate and home delivered meals, while facing a decrease in their reimbursement rates. Further, they noted the need for these services already greatly exceeds the funding received and a reduction could lead to limiting route sizes, long waiting lists and possibly decreasing the frequency that meals are delivered. The people they serve are so grateful:
    - "I truly thank God for this program. It helps me get at least one nutritious meal a day"
    - "I look forward to getting my meals and the delivery girls are precious and kind, like family."
    - "I lost my wife and I am legally blind. This program allows me to live independently."

The timing and critical need to adequately fund congregate and home-delivered meal programs could not be more pressing for those older adults struggling with hunger, isolation and/or loneliness. **That’s why we urge you to provide at least \$1.284 billion for the OAA Nutrition Program in FY 2024 and are committed to working together to strengthen these vital programs and meet our obligation to properly invest in and deliver for our most vulnerable.**

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our nation’s seniors and your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,



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cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee