



May 12, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Blunt and Ranking Members Leahy and Murray:

On behalf of our two organizations, the national network of local senior nutrition programs we represent and the millions of seniors they serve, we thank you for your longstanding leadership and support for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program. We sincerely appreciate the work of this Committee for providing much-needed increases in recent annual appropriations, as well as critical emergency funding to bolster the COVID-19 response in recent months. As you consider appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, we ask you to **increase FY 2021 funding for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program by \$92 million (10%) over enacted FY 2020 levels for a total of \$1,028,753,000.** This request matches the total authorized funding levels for the programs in FY 2021 included in the *Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020* – the bipartisan, bicameral legislation that reauthorized the OAA through FY 2024.

Given the magnitude of need for nutrition services under OAA Title VI Native American aging programs and the new and unfamiliar challenges they now face due to COVID-19, we also request that Congress build upon FY 2020 levels and further **increase funding for Title VI programs, including nutrition services, by at least 20% in FY 2021.**

For decades, senior nutrition programs have generated a powerful social and economic return on investment to older adults and taxpayers alike. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the irreplaceable value of senior nutrition programs has become even more apparent, as they have operated as frontline responders, serving seniors 60 years and older who are among the most vulnerable individuals.

The majority of senior nutrition program participants consistently report that the services help improve their health, make them feel more secure and assist them with remaining in their homes.ⁱ Further, research has shown that older adults with high cost, complex healthcare needs that receive home-delivered nutrition services experience less healthcare utilization and lower expenditures compared to those who do not receive these services.ⁱⁱ For many of the seniors receiving OAA nutrition services, the meal they receive often accounts for the majority of their food intake for the day, and the staff and volunteers who deliver meals to their home may be the only individual(s) they see. In the face of this national emergency, the purposes of the OAA Nutrition Program – to reduce hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, promote socialization and improve health – have never been more important.

Increasing appropriations and supporting maximum funding flexibility for OAA nutrition services, which have received a huge influx in requests for services since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, will allow the senior nutrition network to continue to adapt and scale operations over the course of this fiscal year. With additional resources, more seniors will receive crucial nourishing meals, safety and wellness checks and opportunities for socialization as this public health and economic crisis evolves.

Further, as local and tribal senior nutrition programs strive to address the needs of a rapidly growing older adult population susceptible to hunger, isolation and poverty, they are challenged by the compounding issues of rising costs and increasing demand. Independent of COVID-19, federal funding for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program has not kept up with the need for services and has actually decreased since FY 2001 when accounting for inflation.ⁱⁱⁱ Although the number of seniors eligible for services grew significantly within this time period, and will continue to do so for decades to come, local providers served approximately 20 million fewer congregate and home-delivered meals in 2018 than in 2005 – more than an eight percent decline in the number of meals served.^{iv} Funding for nutrition services for American Indian elders has also remained insufficient to meet the needs of Indian Country, where elders are among the most economically disadvantaged in the nation.

As the Committee determines appropriations levels for FY 2021 and continues to address the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, we urge you to provide, at a minimum, \$1,028,753,000 in funding for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program and a 20% minimum increase in funding for OAA Title VI Native American aging programs. The emergency funding provided in the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* (FFCRA) and the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act* (CARES) just scratches the surface on addressing the growing demand that pre-existed COVID-19 and has only worsened since.

We understand the challenging decisions and existing budgetary limits you face in the upcoming fiscal year, as well the economic uncertainty and depression our nation is experiencing, but now is the time to act. We must ensure these programs that sustain the health, independence and overall well-being of seniors are expanded and properly resourced, especially as our nation responds to the ongoing public health crisis. The requested funding levels will provide essential support to allow these programs to protect and meet the social and nutritional needs of our nation's seniors in FY 2021 and in the years to come.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your leadership and commitment to our nation's seniors.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato
Executive Director
National Association of Nutrition and
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ⁱ Administration for Community Living (ACL), *National Survey of OAA Participants* (2005-2018), available on the AGing, Independence, and Disability (AGID) Program Data Portal: <https://agid.acl.gov/>

ⁱⁱ Berkowitz et al., "Meal Delivery Programs Reduce the Use of Costly Health Care in Dually Eligible Medicare and Medicaid Beneficiaries." *Health Affairs* (Vol. 37(4); 2018), abstract available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29608345>

ⁱⁱⁱ AARP Public Policy Institute, *Older Americans Act* (2019), available at: <https://www.aarp.org/ppi/info-2019/older-americans-act.html>

^{iv} ACL, *State Program Reports* (2005-2018), available on the AGID Program Data Portal: <https://agid.acl.gov/>