



November 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman, Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman, Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy:

We write to you today on behalf of our two organizations and the nationwide network of senior nutrition programs we represent, as well as the millions of at-risk individuals who rely on and are in need of nutritious meals and wellness checks to reduce hunger, isolation and improve their overall health.

As you know, the coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately impacted older adults, who remain at increased risk of COVID-19 and face unique barriers to accessing adequate nutrition and socialization. This current reality has led to an unprecedented demand and need for the essential services that nutrition programs such as Meals on Wheels provide.

We remain grateful for your recognition and support for Older Americans Act (OAA) services in the prior emergency COVID-19 relief packages, as well as recent appropriations cycles; however, the need for increased funding in your states and across the country has never been more urgent. We are eager to work together to respond to the surge in the number of older adults who require our help and urge you and your colleagues to pass bipartisan legislation that includes the following, at a minimum:

- **\$1,028,753,000 for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program in any final FY 2021 appropriations legislation.** This funding request is \$92 million (10%) over enacted FY 2020 levels and 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; and
- **\$925,000,000 for OAA programs, with \$500,000,000 designated specifically for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program, in the next COVID-19 relief legislative package.** This funding was provided in the *Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act* passed by the House on October 1.

In addition to appropriating critical funding for the OAA, we urge Congress to temporarily extend for FY 2021 a number of provisions originally enacted through the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020* that provide OAA nutrition flexibilities and recognize the pandemic-driven challenges communities nationwide have faced – and will continue to face – for months to come. These include:

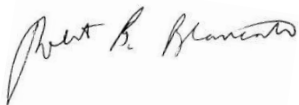
- the extension of temporary waivers that allow for expanded transfer authority between congregate and home-delivered meal programs;
- the ability to make adjustments to dietary guidelines for meals that make it more feasible for senior nutrition providers to continue making the modifications necessary to sustain operations; and
- the expansion of eligibility criteria to serve older adults who are newly in need of meals.

Since the onset of the pandemic in March, senior nutrition providers have consistently reported that funding is the primary factor impacting their ability to serve individuals most directly affected by COVID-19. Yet, funding remains inadequate to meet the dramatically increased demand for nutritious meals and social connection that providers have continued to experience this year. Prior to the pandemic, nearly 9.7 million seniors were already threatened by hungerⁱ and one in four was lonelyⁱⁱ, leaving many Meals on Wheels programs to have to place older adults on wait lists for services amid significant unmet need in their communities. We know these numbers have only risen due to the coronavirus, and even more older adults are experiencing food scarcityⁱⁱⁱ at the same time as the overall monthly poverty rates for individuals age 65 and older are estimated to have reached higher than pre-pandemic levels.^{iv}

The OAA Nutrition Program is a prime example of an effective public-private partnership, with local programs utilizing a diverse set of funds to maintain operations for delivering vital nutrition and socialization services to older adults who remain unduly impacted by the pandemic. However, the economic impact of the pandemic has led to diminishing state and local funding – and private donations. Absent significant relief from Congress, we fear that states and localities will be forced to make deep cuts to programs that support older adults. Disinvestment in vital aging services that address hunger, malnutrition and loneliness will cause otherwise avoidable hospitalizations and premature nursing home placements, increasing healthcare costs and unnecessary suffering.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure that our nation’s older adults, their families and caregivers – and the nonprofit community that serves them – are adequately protected and supported. Thank you for your continued commitment to funding and supporting these critical programs and services.

Sincerely,



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



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cc: Senate Committee on Appropriations

ⁱ J. Ziliak & C. Gundersen (May 2020). *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2018*, an annual report prepared for Feeding America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/senior>

ⁱⁱ AARP (2018). *Loneliness and Social Connections: A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older*. <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/life/info-2018/loneliness-social-connections.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau (2020). *Household Pulse Survey: Food Sufficiency and Food Security Tables*. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>

^{iv} Z. Parolin (October 2020). *Monthly Poverty Rates in the United States during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, a working paper from the Center on Poverty & Social Policy at Columbia University. <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/2020/covid-projecting-monthly-poverty>