



May 4, 2018

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

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

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

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate 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:

This week marks the beginning of Older Americans Month, a month-long celebration where we honor and support our nation's seniors, particularly those most vulnerable. It is in this spirit that our organizations, the local community-based senior nutrition programs we represent and the millions of individuals they serve nationwide, call on you to continue to build on the bipartisan support that exists for Older Americans Act (OAA) Home-Delivered and Congregate Nutrition Programs and the foundational \$59 million funding increase you provided to these programs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. We ask you to again consider the aging population, growing unmet need, and the social and economic effectiveness of these programs by **further increasing funding for OAA Nutrition Programs by \$100 million over FY 2018 levels, for a total of \$996.7 million in funding for FY 2019.**

Despite the much appreciated and warranted down payment provided to OAA Nutrition Programs in the FY 2018 omnibus, the need for more funding is still present – and growing. Today, there are 49.2 million seniors 65 and older, comprising 15.2 percent of the U.S. population; in just two years from now, the senior population is projected to be 56.4 million, or 17 percent of the overall population. Between 2020 and 2030, there will be an additional 18 million seniors in the United States. We must adapt to this dramatic demographic shift with smart, foresighted policy changes, including allocating the funding necessary to serve this growing population.

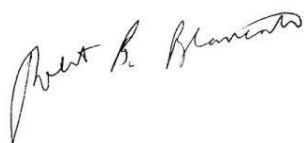
In trying to meet the demand for services with the currently available funding levels, local senior nutrition programs are overwhelmed. The OAA network overall is serving 19 million fewer meals to seniors in need than it was in 2005. In fact, one in four Meals on Wheels programs have a waiting list for services of more than 200 individuals on average. Further, a 2015 Government Accountability Office report found that 83 percent of food-insecure seniors and 83 percent of physically-impaired seniors did not receive meals through OAA programs, but likely needed them. These statistics point to a massive lack of resources in the field already.

We continue to make the case that increasing funding for senior nutrition programs delivers a powerful return to seniors and taxpayers alike. **OAA Nutrition Programs currently take up less than one-tenth of one percent of the total discretionary budget, even with the increases provided in FY 2018;** meanwhile, Medicare and

Medicaid costs climb year over year. Providing meals designed specifically for seniors' nutritional needs can change this. For example, Meals on Wheels clients report fewer falls, which currently cost our nation \$50 billion annually in medical expenses, \$28.9 billion billed directly to Medicare. Furthermore, Medicaid spends \$54.8 billion annually on nursing home care, but with increased funding for meals, more seniors can remain at home, driving this cost down significantly. In fact, the National Survey of OAA Participants indicates that 61 percent of congregate and 92 percent of home-delivered meal recipients say these programs enable them to continue living in their homes and out of costly healthcare facilities.

As your Committee and Subcommittee consider appropriations for FY 2019, we strongly request that you fund the OAA Nutrition Programs at the level of \$996.7 million. It is time to build on the foundational investment you provided in FY 2018 and keep these programs strong – for the seniors of today and tomorrow

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato  
Executive Director  
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