



November 1, 2022

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

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor-HHS-Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Members Shelby and Blunt:

On behalf of the millions of older adults served by the nationwide network of local senior nutrition programs that we represent—thank you for your longstanding leadership and support for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III-C Nutrition Program through the annual appropriations process and in previous critical COVID-19 relief legislation.

To continue this foundational support and sustain home-delivered and congregate nutrition services that effectively reduce hunger, improve health and well-being and enable independence, appropriations increases are urgently needed in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023. **We are calling for a minimum of \$1,933,506,000 for the OAA Nutrition Program to be included in the FY 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS-Ed) Appropriations bill. The specific line-item requests are:**

- **Congregate Nutrition Services (Title III-C-1) – \$965,342,000**
- **Home-Delivered Nutrition Services (Title III-C-2) – \$791,342,000**
- **Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) (Title III) – \$176,822,000**

Your Committee has proposed a total increase of \$63 million for the OAA Nutrition Program in your initial Labor-HHS-Ed Appropriations bill, which would bring the program funding to a total of \$1.03 billion. This proposal, while acknowledging the vital role of senior nutrition programs across the country, ultimately falls short and does not reflect the reality that senior nutrition programs are facing today, nor anticipated challenges in the coming year. We hear stories from across the country pointing to the growing need – and funding is not keeping pace; and in the aggregate, this portends a very significant shortfall with grave implications:

“With an aging population, older adults are increasingly reaching out to us more so than prior to the pandemic. **Funding remains the most important issue** to keep our programs operating and serving those who need us.”—Schuyler County Office for the Aging, NY

“Congress needs to increase funding because costs are spiraling, and we will have to serve fewer people with inadequate funding. We estimate we will serve **100,000+ fewer meals** due to inflation compared to a year ago.”—Meals on Wheels Orange County, CA

“**We are \$8,000-\$10,000 over budget every month** and draining all of our resources to just keep up with rising costs. Our program cannot sustain this much longer and are currently forecasting a \$40,000 deficit in our next fiscal year if we cannot get more funding.”—Gladwin Council on Aging, MI

“**The need skyrocketed overnight when the pandemic began and has not dropped in the slightest;** it's continuing to grow slowly. In contrast, all the covid relief funding of 2020 vanished in 2021 and has not recovered. We grow and grow...and the funding is not supporting us.”—Meals on Wheels of Takoma Park/Silver Spring, MD

Local senior nutrition programs have been simultaneously navigating inflation, supply chain challenges and rising gas prices, leaving them scrambling to successfully serve the growing number of individuals in need. Some of these programs across the nation write:

“Operational costs have proven to be a challenge; a one-two punch of rising costs and less food. When you think about Meals on Wheels, **the two main components are the meals — the food — and the wheels — the gasoline — and both of those items have significantly increased due to inflation.**”—Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, TX

“The pandemic has resulted in significant expense increases, including adding staff in the kitchen, successive years of annual increases in the minimum wage, which impacts kitchen staff and drivers as well as rising food, mileage and supply costs. **How are we going to fund our programs when we return to the "normal" funding streams, without emergency funds?**”—Meals on Wheels Berkshire County, MA

“The rate of inflation for raw food, products and gas has significantly impacted our production of meals for the 8 congregate sites within Belknap and Merrimack County. **We are struggling to purchase quality foods, supplies such as new tires for the food delivery truck, broken ovens, etc.**”—Community Action Program Belknap-Merrimack Counties, NH

The OAA Nutrition Program is a model of a successful public-private partnership in which older adults not only receive nutritious meals, but also benefit from opportunities for socialization, safety checks and connections to community resources – all of which reduce healthcare costs and benefit our communities and taxpayers as a whole. These programs cannot continue to provide these services to all the older adults who need them without sufficient funding:

“Gas has risen to \$6.80 per gallon locally, and our drivers currently cover 2,780 miles per month delivering centrally-prepared meals to three dining centers and homebound seniors in four communities. **We want to expand our routes to feed more rural seniors, yet we already face a deficit.**”—Humboldt Senior Resource Center, CA

“We have been able to avoid a waiting list **but if funding does not increase soon, we will have to implement that waiting list** sooner rather than later.”—Combined Community Action, Inc., TX

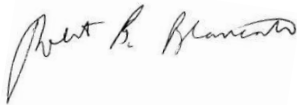
"My food budget in 2021: \$576,680 My food budget in 2022: \$732,246—an increase of \$155,566 or 21%. **This is not sustainable with the current funding levels.** Additional and ongoing

funding would allow us to raise the pay of our longtime staff and better compete with higher wage jobs in the community. It would allow us to more fully afford the food and supplies we need to continue feeding our seniors. It would mean we could CONTINUE feeding them...and avoid service cuts and long waiting lists."—Senior Services of Wichita, KS

To that end, the timing and critical need for investing in nutritious meals for our nation's most vulnerable older adults could not be more urgent. That's why we urge a doubling of funding for the OAA Nutrition Program in FY 2023 to a total of \$1,933,506,000 and are committed to working with you to bring this to fruition. The OAA Nutrition Program has been a bedrock of federal support for senior nutrition programs for the past 50 years, and we must seize this opportunity to properly invest in it.

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

Sincerely,



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cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee