



October 15, 2015

The Honorable John H. Boehner
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We sincerely thank you for your leadership and past support of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs, which provides nearly 224 million nutritious meals to millions of vulnerable seniors across the country. Due to the significant social and economic benefits these programs offer our seniors, our nation and taxpayers as a whole, we urge you to provide a total funding level of \$821 million for the OAA Nutrition Programs in FY 2016. This is the amount approved by the full House Committee on Appropriations and includes a \$2.5 million increase in funding for congregate meals and a \$3.5 million increase in funding for home-delivered meals. We also urge you to include the House Committee on Appropriations' approved increase for OAA Title VI Nutrition Programs of \$5 million, bringing these programs to a funding level of \$31.2 million.

As you determine spending levels for the remainder of FY 2016, **we implore you to avoid any return to sequestration** funding levels for OAA Nutrition Programs. When sequestration was imposed in March 2013, our programs were hit especially hard. This included initiating and/or prolonging time on waiting lists, reducing days and number of meals served, and in some cases, closing sites altogether. Thankfully, you recognized the harmful impact that these reductions had on your constituents and responded with increased funding to pre-sequestration levels in FY 2014 and FY 2015.

By providing nutritious meals, friendly visits, and safety and wellness checks to more than 2.4 million seniors annually, these programs are enabling independence and improving the health of our nation's most vulnerable and medically at-risk older adults. At the same time, they are saving significant taxpayer dollars by preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency room, reducing falls and hospital utilization, and delaying or eliminating altogether the need for nursing home care.

For both congregate and home-delivered meal clients, the companionship provided by volunteers and staff is critical to reducing isolation, which is as vitally important to health and quality of life as the meal itself. These programs continue to meet Congress' intent and the exact purposes outlined in the OAA. Further, they are the only federally supported nutrition programs designed specifically to address the unique social and nutritional needs of seniors.

While we recognize and appreciate the past increases provided for OAA Nutrition Programs, we need to go further. Year after year, local, community-based nutrition programs are serving both fewer seniors and meals while the need and demand escalates at an unprecedented pace. Since 2005, the OAA nutrition network has served 21.3 million fewer meals while waiting lists continue to mount in every state. This

growing gap is due to declining public funding, stagnant private funding, and rising food and transportation costs. We must, at a minimum, halt this continuous decline, as even level funding represents a \$5.4 million reduction when adjusted for inflation year over year. Increasing funding for the congregate and home-delivered meals programs to the levels included in the House Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill reported out of Committee would help prevent further erosion of service in FY 2016.

Finally, with more than 12,000 seniors reaching the eligibility age for OAA programs every day, now is the time to provide a greater investment in these proven and cost-effective programs. We urge you to look to OAA Nutrition Programs as part of the solution to reducing healthcare expenditures and our nation's larger budget challenges. So, it is in this spirit that we again ask you to fund OAA Nutrition Programs at a total of \$821 million and avoid sequestration in any final appropriations agreement.

Thank you for your continued support. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to our organizations.

Sincerely,



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