

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 10, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
Room S-230, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
Room S-221, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

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

As Congress considers additional relief in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to prioritize nutrition programs for older adults. Specifically, we request that the next COVID-19 relief package include \$1.1 billion in funding for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs, including \$750 million for OAA Nutrition Services, which critically support the delivery of nutritious meals to older adults throughout the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting older adults. With the closure of congregate meal sites and the steep increase in newly homebound older adults, there is now a higher demand for OAA Programs, such as Home Delivered Meals and other community-based supportive services. According to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), 93 percent of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) have reported serving more clients since the pandemic began, and 69 percent of AAAs saw an increase in demand for their supportive services. In addition, Meals on Wheels America members are serving an average of 77 percent more meals to 47 percent more seniors since March, with virtually all programs having seen the cost of providing services increase. According to n4a, AAAs reported a 52 percent increase in demand for their caregiver support programs, a 32 percent increase in demand for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, and an 84 percent increase in demand for telephone wellness checks, which may be the only form of contact for socially isolated, homebound older adults.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act were important first steps in responding to the increased demand for OAA programs, but additional funding is needed to continue providing vital services to seniors across the country. Even prior to the pandemic, an estimated 5.3 million (more than 7

percent) older adults experienced food insecurity and more than 17.4 million (24 percent) lived alone, putting them at greater risk of being socially isolated and/or lonely. In addition, COVID-19 has also magnified existing disparities for low-income older adults, which underscores the need for funding and programming to be appropriately targeted to those with the greatest need. Ensuring nutrition and supportive services reach communities of color, including those with disproportionately high infection and death rates, is extremely important as we work to address COVID-19 related racial and ethnic disparities.

Many older adults remain unable to safely access congregate meals and engage in other social activities outside of the home during this time. We urge you build on Congress' past support for senior meal delivery by including \$1.1 billion in funding for OAA programs, including \$750 million for OAA Nutrition Services, in the next COVID-19 relief bill for senior nutrition and other targeted efforts to address social isolation. We also urge you to prioritize sufficient supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed for these services and testing for social services staff, health care workers, older adults, and their caregivers.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

/s/ Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator