

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 13, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, and Chairwoman Granger, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Thank you for the Committee's bipartisan leadership in providing resources to the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III-C Nutrition Program.

As you consider the FY 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we urge you to continue to provide sufficient funding for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program. This funding enables the delivery of 230 million nutritious meals annually to 2.2 million older adults facing hunger and isolation. To meet these needs and begin addressing rising demand, we request at least \$1.284 billion for the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Services program to continue administering essential nutrition programs that support the health and wellness of our nation's most vulnerable older adults. This program has historically been backed by bipartisan support.

Since 1972, the OAA Nutrition Program has been successfully meeting its purposes to: reduce hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition of older adults; promote socialization of older individuals; and promote the health and well-being of older people. By providing nutritious meals and social connection delivered in congregate settings, such as senior centers, or directly to one's home, Title III-C Nutrition Programs allow older adults to age in the dignity and security of their own homes. These nutrition services also reduce costly healthcare expenditures stemming from preventable hospitalizations and premature nursing home placements. Put simply, this effective community-based and federally supported program improves senior health, safety, social connection and more while simultaneously saves healthcare funds.

The number of Americans 65 years and older is increasing. Between 1980 and 2020 this group experienced a 59% increase by growing by more than 20.5 million.¹ By 2060 the number of older adults will surpass 95 million, compared to more than 55 million older adults in 2023.² Demand for OAA services is expected to increase in the coming years as the older adult population continues to increase.

Food insecurity has long been a problem for older adults. In 2021, at least 5.5 million older Americans faced food security.³ The National Council on Aging reports that hunger is more likely for older Americans who are

¹ <https://usafacts.org/articles/america-is-getting-older-which-states-have-the-largest-elderly-populations/>

² <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/older-americans-month.html>

³ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/State%20of%20Senior%20Hunger%20in%202021.pdf>

Black, Hispanic, or Native American, who have lower incomes, or who have a disability.⁴ Mental health is also affected by food insecurity as 24% of food insecure older adults report fair or poor mental health compared to 5% of food secure older adults.⁵

Economic insecurity is prevalent among older adults with more than 17 million facing incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level.⁶ Older adults, particularly those who are vulnerable and underserved, are disproportionately sensitive to rising food prices with many financially dependent on fixed incomes. Data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) show that the all-food Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by a total of 20.4%, higher than the all-items CPI which only grew at 16.5%. These prices are expected to continue to increase by 2.1% in 2024.⁷ Increasing food costs affect nutrition delivery services which would need an estimated \$32 million in federal funding just to offset FY24 inflation. About one in four older adults 65+ already scrimp on food, utilities, clothing, or medication to pay for medical care.⁸ Economic and food insecurity in light of rising food costs are specifically problematic to older adults due to decreased mobility, limited shopping and cooking ability, and health challenges.⁹

Services provided under the OAA Title III-C Nutrition Program are shown to improve physical and mental health outcomes among older adults. For example, a Meals on Wheels report shows that malnourishment and feelings of social isolation improve among participants receiving daily-delivered meals. Older adults receiving regular meals report feeling safer at home. This study also reports that hospitalizations decreased significantly when comparing 3 months before and after enrollment. Feelings of social isolation were significantly improved among those living alone who receive daily-delivered meals.¹⁰

Meals on Wheels notes that “A knock at the door might not seem like a big deal to many of us. But, to a homebound senior, it could signal the arrival of the only person they might see all day or all week long. It brings hope. It brings health. It brings the nutrition and care that will completely make their day. A knock from Meals on Wheels can even save lives.”¹¹

Investing in the OAA – a program that represents just one-hundredth of 1% of the entire federal budget – saves taxpayer dollars by reducing premature and costly Medicare and Medicaid expenditures resulting from unnecessary nursing home placement or hospitalizations due to poor nutrition and chronic health conditions. We respectfully request the FY24 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill include at least \$1.284 billion for these vital nutrition programs.

These vital OAA services fulfill our nation’s commitment to supporting the right of all people to live independently and age with dignity, regardless of income or location. Thank you.

⁴ <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-economic-security-for-seniors>

⁵ <https://www.healthyingpoll.org/reports-more/report/how-food-insecurity-affects-older-adults>

⁶ <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-economic-security-for-seniors>

⁷ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/>

⁸ <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-economic-security-for-seniors>

⁹ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2015/020215#:~:text=Seniors%20represent%20a%20particularly%20vulnerable.challenges%20related%20to%20food%20insecurity.>

¹⁰ https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/docs/default-source/research/the-case-for-meals-on-wheels/fact-sheet_the-case-for-meals-on-wheels_9-8-23.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/>

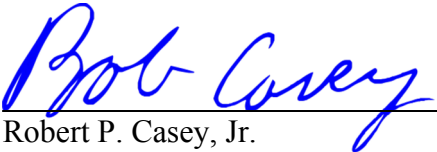
Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



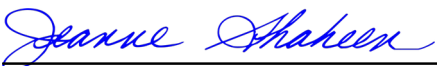
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



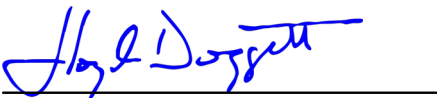
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



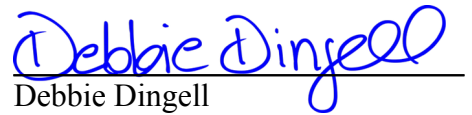
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Donald G. Davis
Member of Congress



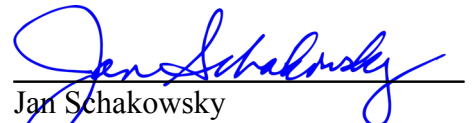
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



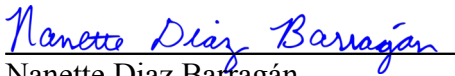
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Mary Sattler Peltola
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Stacey E. Plaskett
Member of Congress