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National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Department of Labor

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray;

On behalf of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP), an 1,100-member nonpartisan, nonprofit, membership organization for national advocates for senior health and well-being, we thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of the Department of Health and Human Services’ proposed increase of $13.8 million for Older Americans Act Title III(C) senior nutrition programs within the Administration for Community Living, and in support of, at a minimum, the President’s request for level funding for the Senior Community Service Employment Program within the Department of Labor.

**Older Americans Act Title III(C) Senior Nutrition Programs**

Older Americans Act congregate and home-delivered meals programs are provided in every state and congressional district in this nation. Approximately 2.4 million seniors in 2014 received these services. Studies have found that 50 percent of all persons age 85 and over need help with instrumental activities of daily living, including obtaining and preparing food. Older Americans Act nutrition programs address these concerns. Thus, these meal recipients are able to remain independent in their homes and communities and are not forced into hospitals or nursing homes due to an inability to maintain a proper diet.

In addition, for participants in the congregate program, the nutrition programs provide a daily opportunity for socialization, preventing isolation and promoting health and wellness. For home-delivered meals recipients, their delivery driver may be the only person they see all day—therefore, this wellness check is also key to their health.

In FY 2016, Older Americans Act Title III(C) programs received appropriations in the amount of $835 million. Though we are thankful that this represents an increase from FY 2015, unfortunately, this does not keep pace with the rising cost of food, inflation, and the growing numbers of older adults. In fact, year over year, the number of older adults receiving meals is shrinking even as the need is growing.

The additional $13.8 million in funding for congregate and home-delivered meals will help to counteract inflation and provide more than 1.3 million additional meals. This does not keep up with the growing demand for services, but it would at least prevent further reductions in services.
As we saw in FY 2013 when sequestration was in effect, our programs had lengthy wait lists and some sites even closed for lack of funding. One NANASP program created its first wait list in over 90 years of operation.

Investing in these programs is cost-effective because many common chronic conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis can be effectively prevented and treated with proper nutrition. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics estimates that 87 percent of older adults have or are at risk of hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, or some combination of all of these. These seniors need healthy meals, access to lifestyle programs, and nutrition education and counseling to avoid serious medical care.

Older adults who are not receiving proper meals can also become malnourished and undernourished. This makes it harder for them to recover from surgery and disease, makes it more difficult for their wounds to heal, increases their risk for infections and falls, and decreases their strength that they need to take care of themselves. Malnourished older adults are more likely to have poor health outcomes and to be readmitted to the hospital—their health costs can be 300 percent greater than those who are not malnourished on entry to the health care system.

Access to Older Americans Act meals is essential to keeping these older adults out of costly nursing facilities and hospitals. On average, a senior can be fed for a year for about $1,300. The cost of feeding a senior for a year is approximately the same as the cost of one day’s stay in a hospital or less than the cost of 10 days in a nursing home. The cost savings to Medicare and Medicaid that this creates cannot be over-emphasized. One study estimates that for every dollar invested in the Older Americans Act nutrition programs, Medicaid saves $50.

Further, these services are designed to target those in the “greatest social and economic need,” according to the Older Americans Act and to actual practice in the field. According to ACL’s studies, approximately two-thirds of home-delivered meal recipients have annual incomes of $20,000 or less. Sixty-two percent of these recipients report that these meals represent at least half their food intake each day. And yet, the Government Accountability Office found that only about nine percent of low-income older adults are even receiving meals services. For a small investment, more at-risk older adults could receive nutritious meals.

**Senior Community Service Employment Program**

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), also known as Community Service Employment for Older Americans, is authorized by the Older Americans Act but administered and funded by the Department of Labor. SCSEP is the only federal program targeted to serve specifically older adults seeking employment and training assistance; moreover, the Government Accountability Office has previously identified SCSEP as one of only three federal workforce programs with no overlap or duplication.

SCSEP currently provides jobs for about 67,000 older adults in every state and territory, and in nearly every county in every state. Many of these jobs are in the service of other older adults—SCSEP participants may work as senior center staff members, transportation providers, or home-
delivered meals cooks and drivers. The average age of a program participant is 62; according to the Department of Labor, 65% of all SCSEP participants in Program Year 2012 were women, 46% were minorities, and 88% were at or below the federal poverty level.

NANASP has one SCSEP national grantee and approximately 80 SCSEP state and local subgrantees who are NANASP members, as well as many nutrition providers among our membership who have SCSEP employees on staff.

SCSEP, as authorized by Title V of the Older Americans Act (OAA), has a dual purpose: “to foster individual economic self-sufficiency and to increase the number of participants placed in unsubsidized employment in the public and private sectors, while maintaining the community service focus of the program.”

By providing subsidized employment opportunities for this highly vulnerable and underemployed/unemployed segment of the population, SCSEP helps participants build their resumes and receive the training they need to transition into unsubsidized employment. These subsidized employment opportunities also provide staff members for other community programs that may lack funding for regular hires—not only senior centers, but also public libraries, schools, hospitals, and other community agencies.

Considering that other programs that received cuts during the FY 2013 sequestration have not had their funding even partially restored, we are pleased that in FY 2016, funding for SCSEP held level at $434.4 million where it has remained since its partial restoration in FY 2014. However, this is not enough to meet the growing need for SCSEP—both in participants and in wages.

Many states and localities are raising the minimum wage, and this dilutes SCSEP funding, which has to increase to match increasing wages. This decreases the number of participants SCSEP can handle, yet the older population is growing. The last time there was an increase in funding for SCSEP, other than under the FYs 2009-2010 stimulus package, was when the federal minimum wage was increased. Though wages have not increased at the federal level, they have increased in enough states and localities to the point that SCSEP is becoming strained.

With more than 10,000 seniors turning 65 every day, now is the time to provide an even greater investment in these proven and cost-effective programs for older adults.

Thank you for your past and future support.