

Meals on Wheels & CANASP

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee

March 3, 2021

H.B. 6439: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My associates and I are here to speak on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Providers (CANASP), which is comprised of the nine regional providers of Elderly Nutrition Programs (ENPs) throughout the state.

I am here to offer my testimony on the Governor's budget proposal with regard to the DSS and ADS appropriations. We appreciate your continued recognition of the problems Elderly Nutrition Programs face and are aware of the great successes we have had during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Elderly Nutrition Programs were ready to serve our seniors on day one and continue to hold strong during the Pandemic Keeping seniors safe and supplying nutrition and daily wellness checks. During all of this Connecticut's Meals on Wheels Programs put our capability to serve in full view, we continue to innovate on the fly and we are creating new policy and procedure daily as needed. It is evident that you understand the importance of community-based services like Meals on Wheels and the positive impact that those services have on keeping seniors healthy and independent in their own homes.

Meals on Wheels programs continue to operate in an COVID 19 economy that has experienced a CPI increase exceeding 14% since 2007. At the 2020 reimbursement rate, ENPs have experienced a loss of nearly \$1M statewide between the cost of labor, meals and delivery from the CHCPE reimbursement rate currently received.

Furthermore, this budget proposal makes a concerted effort to help nonprofit providers across a number of agencies by providing funding to help offset the impact of the minimum wage increase. We applaud the initiative, and appreciate the coinciding funding provided in the ADS budget for the Elderly Nutrition Providers. However, we do not believe the ENPs will benefit from the parallel increases under the CT Home Care Program for Elders. We believe this is the result of the reimbursement seemingly tied to the cost of meal. However, the service provided to deliver the meal is what truly benefits from the funding. We request reconsideration of this decision and hope that funding can be provided not only under the Elderly Nutrition line item in ADS, but also under CTHCP in DSS. Of course, as wages rise so too does the cost of preparing and delivering meals. If Elderly Nutrition Providers are carved-out of these adjustments, we risk nullifying the impact of this Committee's hard work in last year's budget.

Elderly Nutrition Programs are facing large increases in Food Cost, Paper Cost and increases in demand. Many CHCPE programs have a COLA tied to the increasing minimum wage because they bill by the hour, and more than one provider has had to pull out of CHCPE due to the low reimbursement rate. COVID has changed the way we do our services, and our rosters have increased during COVID due to seniors' decline in both mental and physical health because of the pandemic. These are folks that may have been in a congregate setting pre-pandemic, many of which will not be going back to the congregate setting. CHCPE meals need to be recognized with specific language that would increase our rate yearly along with the COLA percentage that is shared along other Home Care hourly services.

Meals on Wheels provides a vital service for older Americans nationwide, many of whom are low-income. The meals we provide enable seniors to remain in their homes, benefiting them by preserving their independence and benefiting the state by saving funds that would otherwise be used for more expensive institutional care. Not only do delivered meals ensure that our seniors are eating nutritious foods regularly, they also offer personal contact which is essential to older adults living alone in their community. Half of all persons at and over the age of 85 need assistance with instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), including obtaining and preparing food. Meals on Wheels serves to address those needs.

Further, many of the most common chronic conditions – hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis – can be prevented or risk-reduced with proper nutrition. Among Medicare beneficiaries, those with multiple chronic conditions are the heaviest users of healthcare services; because the prevalence of multiple chronic conditions is higher among home-delivered meal recipients than for the general Medicare population, the provision of healthy meals and nutrition counseling is important to helping such individuals avoid more serious and more costly medical care. Access to healthy meals is essential to the wellbeing of Connecticut’s senior population and beneficial to the state’s fiscal position in the long-run.

Thank you for your support of this crucial program and the senior citizens that rely on it!

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