

October 30, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader Jeffries, and Minority Leader McConnell:

The 65 undersigned national organizations write today regarding the urgent need for emergency supplemental funding for senior nutrition programs to address the rapidly escalating national crises of hunger and isolation that impact millions of older Americans. **We urge you to prioritize \$200 million in emergency supplemental funding for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program to especially address mounting wait lists for Meals on Wheels services.** This would enable senior nutrition programs to provide nearly 75 million additional meals and serve approximately 650,000 more older adults in desperate need.

Unfortunately, a confluence of recent events has caused an untenable financial strain on the national network of senior nutrition programs, leading to a severe and worsening national emergency. This includes the expiration of pandemic dollars, cuts in Fiscal Year 2024 funding to the OAA Nutrition Program—the first in over a decade—elevated gas and food prices, shortages of volunteers, and a dearth of philanthropic support (only 1% of which goes to seniors/aging). The impact is driving substantial growth in waiting lists by programs that are unable to meet the increasing needs in their communities. In a recent survey of the Meals on Wheels network, 45% of programs currently have a wait list or intend to start one, with an average wait of 108 days and in some cases up to two years. Further, the epidemic of social isolation and loneliness recently declared by the U.S. Surgeon General continues to be exacerbated as more and more vulnerable older adults live in isolation.

For more than 50 years, the OAA Nutrition Program has effectively supported the health and well-being of older adults, reducing hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition, social isolation, loneliness, and healthcare utilization and costs, enabling them to live in their own homes with dignity and independence. The national network of more than 5,000 local home-delivered and congregate programs provides critical services in all states and Congressional districts. And, with natural disasters and public emergencies occurring with greater frequency and intensity, these programs continue to work on the front lines to ensure the safety and well-being of older adults in harm's way and contribute substantially to the broader community response and recovery efforts.

The impact of these programs was never more evident than during the pandemic when, because of expanded flexibilities and several rounds of emergency funding—amounting to over \$1.6 billion in total—they were able to successfully scale to meet skyrocketing need, providing vital lifelines to hundreds of thousands of additional older adults. Demand for senior nutrition and social connection services has not decreased since the end of the pandemic, and programs are being

asked to serve record numbers of older adults with less available federal funding and sustained high costs.

Given these on-the-ground realities, we urge you to follow the example of congressional action in response to the looming crisis last year when the WIC program faced the prospect of a waiting list for the first time in a generation. We are already amid an emergency for vulnerable older adults and the programs that serve them. This emergency will only grow more dire without immediate action.

Therefore, on behalf of the 65 organizations representing a diverse range of national groups and programs, **we call on you to prioritize \$200 million in emergency supplemental funding for the OAA Nutrition Program to help address the worsening crises of hunger and isolation that have put millions of our vulnerable older adults in grave danger.**

We deeply appreciate your consideration of our request. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Meals on Wheels America
National Association of Nutrition & Aging Services Programs (NANASP)

AARP
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
ADvancing States
Aging Life Care Association
Alliance for Aging Research
Alliance to End Hunger
ALS Association
American Foundation for the Blind
American Geriatrics Society
American Society for Nutrition
American Society on Aging
Avodah
Better Medicare Alliance
Blooming Health
Blue Future
Bread for the World
Church World Service
Claris Healthcare
Coalition on Human Needs
Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness
CommonSpirit Health
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Province
Defeat Malnutrition Today
DoorDash
Elder Justice Coalition
End Hunger Network
Food Research & Action Center
Generations United
Gerontological Society of America
HealthHIV

Homeplate Solutions Inc.
Justice in Aging
Keshet
LCO Aging & Disability Services
LeadingAge
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
MomsRising
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance for Caregiving
National AmeriCorps Seniors Association
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of RSVP Directors
National Association of Social Workers
National Caucus and Center on Black Aging
National Consumers League
National Council of Nonprofits
National Council on Aging
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Minority Quality Forum
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
Neighborhood Care Network
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Rabbinical Assembly
Senior Connections
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
The Episcopal Church
Trinity Health
Unitarian Universalists
USAging
Village to Village Network, Inc.
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement

cc: President Joseph R. Biden
The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Honorable Neera Tanden, Director, Domestic Policy Council
The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Maura Calsyn, Acting Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging
The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Susan Collins, Vice Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations