



**Testimony of Tabatha Caso, Executive Director, Eastern Area Agency on Aging**

**To Joint Standing Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs**

**In favor of LD 258: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government**

**Delivered by writing on February 20, 2023**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Tabatha Caso and I am the Executive Director of Eastern Area Agency on Aging (EAAA). EAAA has served Penobscot, Piscataquis, Hancock, and Washington counties since 1973 and provides direct services and resource and referral coordination to more than 9,800 individuals each year across our 13,000 square mile territory. At EAAA, our mission is to provide older adults, caregivers and adults with disabilities in Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis and Washington counties with the information and access to resources they need to be healthy, engaged and supported in their communities. As the population continues to age within a complex system, LD 258 initiative to use the General Fund to provide funding to enhance Maine's aging and disability resource centers is vital.

Home Delivered Meals, more commonly known as Meals on Wheels, delivers meals to homebound people 60 years of age and over who are unable to prepare meals. In addition to receiving the meals, consumers receive an assessment of their nutrition status and referrals are made, as appropriate, to other programs to ensure all of their needs are met. If the consumer is determined to have high nutritional risk, they can also access Nutrition Counseling by a Registered Dietician through the Meals on Wheels program. Meals are delivered regularly to participants by volunteers who not only take the time to conduct safety checks, but also to provide a caring connection. When funds are available, the program also serves disabled adults under 60.

In fiscal year 2019, EAAA served over 63,000 meals to homebound individuals through the Meals on Wheels program. Through the pandemic, all regions of Maine saw significant growth in demand for Meals on Wheels and the individuals continue to be eligible and need the service. In fiscal year 2022, EAAA served over 170,000 meals, a 170% increase compared to pre-pandemic.

While we received additional federal funding during the pandemic to help alleviate some of the costs, the funding was temporary, and the need was not. Without additional funding, it will leave many homebound older adults at risk for losing this life sustaining program. The AAA's across the state will be forced to reduce services and start waitlists. LD 258 initiative to use the General Fund to provide ongoing funding for home delivered meals to replace expected decreases in federal COVID-19 funding, is one step we can take to help prevent this from happening.

Annually we ask consumers to provide feedback on the Meals on Wheels Program. I have attached, to my testimony, direct quotes from consumers on how Meals on Wheels has impacted them.

I ask for the Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs to support LD 258 with a unanimous ought to pass vote to permanently increase funding to fill this vital need for older Mainers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.



**Direct quotes from Eastern Area Agency on Aging consumers on how Meals on Wheels impacts them:**

“If not for the program **I would not be able to have enough to eat each month**. I can't drive or walk to food pantries. Thank you for this important service.”

“You do an extraordinary job to the community, if it wasn't for you and your team **I may not eat some days**. The volunteers are so great and I just love them. These folks deserve an award and a big hug! I love them!”

“With my wife's illness she is no longer able to cook. (Alzheimer's) My limited ability makes the Meals on Wheels a great program. **Still able to function at home**. Much appreciated.”

“I can't thank you enough for this program. I have many serious health problems and after breaking my femur in 2 places, surgery and spending 6 weeks in the hospital **I truly needed help**. Your meals are delicious and helped me to heal with a smile on my face. I also started to eat lots of well-cooked **veggies for the first time**. Thank you so much!”

“Meals on Wheels served an **important stop-gap** while my wife was recovering from surgery and I served as full time home care. Deeply appreciated.”

“It's been so great for my mom to get these meals. **She is healthier and safer**. It takes a lot of worry off of my plate. Thank you so much!”

“They go beyond to make sure **we are safe** and have everything we need. One day they cleaned snow from my door.”

“The delivery people are very nice, courteous and helpful. This program is **so necessary** - aging kind of creeps up on us and having a meal ready at the end of the day sometimes can be overwhelming and this meal makes it much easier.”

“I appreciate meals for me because it eliminates cooking, **which would cause problems for me**. Thank you so much!”

“This is a wonderful program and 100% ++++ satisfied with: the meals; the service; the delivery driver is amazing!! Everyone is always so helpful and wants to **make sure you are happy!** Thank you!!!!”

“At my age it is difficult to cook all the time and **store microwave meals have a lot of cholesterol**, which I don't need.”

“Keep up the interesting food! It's inspiring me to eat and so far, my **weight has been stable!**”

“I really appreciate having the "Meals on Wheels" service. My health hasn't allowed me to prepare meals, **especially with my dietary restrictions**. Thank you so much for providing this service!”