



**Testimony of Jessica Fay for
The Maine Council on Aging
February 18, 2026
Supplemental Budget – OADS Section**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Jess Fay and I am the Policy and Advocacy Director for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA), a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. We are offering testimony neither for nor against the proposed supplemental budget and request that ongoing funding for Maine's Area Agencies on Aging be included to meet increasing needs of older people.

In the next few months some older people who are currently receiving home delivered meals – Meals on Wheels – will receive a notice that they will no longer receive the meals because of inadequate funding. This is unprecedented. For the last four years, we have been warning that the waitlist for this program will continue to grow. This means that more older people will go hungry. When it was available, ARPA money covered the waitlist for a time and masked the need for additional state investment. The one-time funding you appropriated last year allowed a reduction in the waitlists but did not eliminate them. That funding has almost all been spent.

Meals on Wheels (MOW) is a targeted intervention that is available to people 60 years of age or older who are homebound and unable to leave their house without assistance, unable to prepare a meal and have no one available to prepare a meal. When funds are available, the program also serves disabled adults under 60 who meet the other requirements.

People who meet these criteria don't have family who can shop and cook for them. They are unable to prepare food on their own, even if food is provided from a food pantry. While neighbors and community members might be able to provide some meals, this isn't a guarantee that their needs for daily, nutritious meals will be met. Most MOW recipients are very low income and cannot afford to pay for a meal delivery service.

The annual per-person cost for this program is low and yields an impressive return on investment. This single intervention of home delivered meals has been demonstrated to aid in wound healing, decrease loneliness, reduce avoidable hospital readmissions, and delay entry into facility-based care for more than two years.

As Maine's aging population grows and faces new challenges like changes to SNAP and Medicaid eligibility for people between 60-64 due to HR1, increased caregiving responsibilities and ageism, it is critical that we plan for and make ongoing investments in all the work that AAAs do. LD 814 as passed unanimously by the HHS Committee is currently on the appropriations table and does just this.

There is no request for additional funding for AAAs included in the proposed supplemental budget. Given the growing waitlists for AAA services, ongoing funding for the AAAs should be included. Every dollar invested in the AAAs stretches even further because the AAAs leverage a network of 1,500 dedicated volunteers across the state.

By providing opportunities for older people to volunteer, the AAAs are also contributing to the well-being of our communities. Companionship programs, volunteer-led evidence-based falls prevention, opportunities for learning new skills, connecting people to resources and services in their communities - these are all part of the work that AAAs do. This work is critical and deserves to be funded in a way that allows the AAAs to meet the individual needs of the communities they serve.

Please include funding for critical supports and services provided by Maine's area agencies on aging in the supplemental budget.

On page A-51 of the supplemental Budget Document the Dept. has proposed a one-time cost-of living adjustment for the state-funded sections of MaineCare – sections 61,63,68, 69. These sections are for in home supports. These are cost effective programs that prevent people from needing more expensive levels of care. These sections should also be included in any COLA that is appropriated for other MaineCare sections that utilize direct care.