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Testimony in Support of LD 485 (SP0191)

An Act To Continue Funding for Home-Delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and To Address Growing Demand

Good afternoon Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Joy Barresi Saucier, of Presque Isle, Maine, offering testimony in support of LD 485 in my role as Executive Director of the Aroostook Agency on Aging and President of the Maine Association of Agencies on Aging.

As we age, we want to make our own decisions and live independently. We know that when we age in our home community, we contribute our knowledge and talent to make our community stronger. There are five Agencies on Aging in Maine; all focused on helping older adults continue to live independently in their home communities.

Older adults in Maine number over 369,000 or 28% of the total population. We know that 1 of every 4 older adults live alone in Maine and that 1 of every 6 are threatened by hunger.

All Agencies on Aging offer five categories of core service, one of which is focused on supporting the nutritional needs of older adults. All Agencies on Aging address nutritional needs through a variety of programs, including Home-Delivered Meals, Congregate Dining, and Nutrition Counseling and Education.

Home Delivered Meals, more commonly known as Meals on Wheels, provides daily fresh meals or weekly frozen meals to older adults who are homebound and have difficulty with meal preparation. All participants receive an assessment of their nutrition status and referrals are made as appropriate to other programs and services to help ensure good nutrition and independence. 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 to the community.

A Brown University study in 2015 found that older adults living alone who received meals had significant reductions in feelings of isolation and loneliness, were less worried about staying in their homes, felt safer, and experienced fewer falls and hospitalizations. There have been many examples throughout the state of situations where Home Delivered Meals staff and volunteers have saved the lives of those served.

Through the pandemic, all regions of Maine saw significant growth in demand for Home-Delivered Meals. In the fiscal year prior to COVID, statewide over 5,200 older adults were provided with over 661,000 meals. Last year, during COVID, that number basically doubled to over 10,000 older adults receiving over 985,000 meals. The fact that approximately 2/3 of individuals who currently receive the service will continue to remain qualified after expanded COVID19 eligibility expires indicates that the community need was present all along.

Contributions from the community make the program highly cost efficient. Last year, nearly 840 volunteers throughout Maine contributed about 45,600 hours of service to the program. Valued at aroostookaging.org

\$1.16 million, this volunteer time exceeded the total amount contributed to the program through either state funding or regular Older Americans Act Title III funding. In addition, the Agencies on Aging raised \$2.5 million to support the program from corporate, individual, foundation, and municipal donations.

Total expenditures state-wide for Home Delivered Meals in 2019-2020 exceeded \$7.5 million, with 10% of those costs covered through state funding from LD 1001, which will end as of June 30, 2021. In addition, 35% of total costs were covered through Families First and Cares Act response packages, which will end as of September 30, 2021.

This leaves many older adults in the state at risk for losing this life sustaining program. Beginning in the fall of 2021, Agencies on Aging will be forced to reduce services and start waitlists for individuals who qualify. LD 485 is one step we can take to prevent this from happening as it provides an additional \$1.5M state funding annually to ensure home-delivered meals continue to be available for homebound older adults.

We appreciate your support as we all work together to continue to meet the needs of older adults living independently in the great State of Maine.

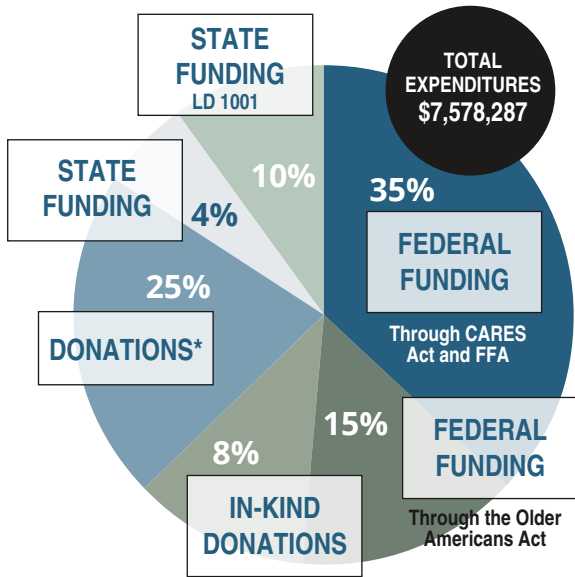
Joy Barresi Saucier
Executive Director, Aroostook Agency on Aging
Chair, Maine Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A)



Maine Association of
Area Agencies on Aging

Meals On Wheels

Vital to Older Adults in Maine



*Corporate, individual, foundations, and municipal donations

The hybrid funding for Meals-On-Wheels makes it a successful public-private partnership. State funding **MUST** be increased so that the Area Agencies on Aging can continue to meet the hunger demand and take care of older Mainers.

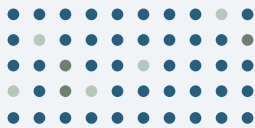
The Area Agencies on Aging have collectively supported thousands of older adults over the past year by delivering nutritious meals and safety checks.

- Maine's older adult population is growing at a rapid pace.
- Older adults living at or below poverty are twice as likely to have to live in expensive long-term care facilities or rely on caregivers.
- The Meals on Wheels program prevents hospitalizations, improves safety, and combats social isolation for older adults.

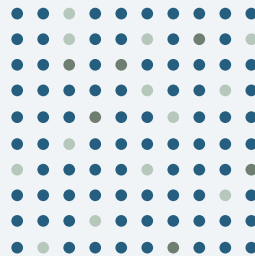


The pandemic has doubled the demand for the Meals on Wheels program... and the demand is not going away.

Older Adults Served



5,246
2018-2019



10,120
2019-2020

2019-2020 Numbers



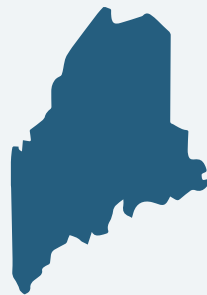
838 Volunteers
45,593 Hours
Equivalent to \$1,159,430
in donated time.



Meals Served
2018-2019: 661,286
2019-2020: 985,473



Maine Older Adults Quick Facts



- Older adult Population: **369,485 (28%)**
- Older adults living alone: **92,716 (25%)**
- Older adults living in poverty: **32,887 (9%)**
- Older adults threatened by hunger: **57,270 (16%)**

