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### **Testimony In Favor of LD 485**

#### **An Act To Continue Funding for Home-Delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and To Address Growing Demand 3/17/2021**

Sen. Claxton, Rep. Meyer and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Jessica Fay, Representative for the people of House District 66, parts of the towns of Casco, Poland and Raymond. I am here today testifying in favor of LD 485 because Meals on Wheels offers an incredibly high return on investment.

In past years, the Legislature has recognized the importance and value in funding home-delivered meals for older Mainers and we should continue that support going forward. The numbers of people accessing this program, efficiently implemented through Maine's Area Agencies on Aging, have doubled during the pandemic. Many of the new program participants had been eligible prior to COVID-19 but had chosen not to participate or even realized they were eligible.

Increased access to federal funding has allowed these folks to be served without a wait list, and it is our moral obligation to make sure that when this crisis is over eligible folks can continue to receive home delivered meals. Doesn't it make sense to include the one-time funding requested each biennium in the baseline budget going forward? We cannot continue to depend on federal relief funds that will eventually end to fund anticipated ongoing need for necessary services.

But the value of Meals on Wheels doesn't just lie in access to nutrition. Many of us have a better understanding of the negative health impact of social isolation now than we did prior to the pandemic. That weekly visit from a volunteer, even a socially distanced visit, can act as a lifeline for homebound older adults, helping to connect them to the outside world. Meals on wheels helps older Mainers remain independent and in their homes.

During the time when the Legislature wasn't in session, I was one of 838 volunteers who delivered meals, and I know there are other Legislators who did as well, including Sen. Moore. What I learned as a volunteer was how important that weekly check in is.

One week I found a meal recipient had fallen and was unable to get up – they had been on the living room floor for at least 15 hours when I found them. I called Rescue and they were transported to the hospital. With no one nearby checking in daily, I am grateful that I arrived when I did. This individual could have been lying there alone for days or even died alone, if not for a meal delivery. This is not a unique incident.

I learned a great deal from the folks I delivered meals to. I met their dogs and cats, listened to their stories – from a distance - and even got to know what their favorite meals were. I think I benefitted from these interactions as much as the folks I delivered meals to!

Meals on Wheels provides nutrition, health and social benefits and I encourage the Committee to recommend this funding so that all homebound people who are eligible, have access to this lifesaving program. Thank you for your time and attention and I am happy to try to answer any questions.