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To the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Testimony in Support of LD 485: "An Act to Continue Funding for Home-delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and To Address Growing Demand"

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Barbara Price, I'm the Nutrition Services Director of SeniorsPlus, one of the five Agencies on Aging in the state serving Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties, and also the statewide provider of care coordination for those seeking to remain in their homes. The goal of SeniorsPlus is to assist people to age well so that they are able to stay at home independently as long as possible.

I am writing in support of LD 485: An Act to Continue Funding for Home-delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and to Address Growing Demand."

Nutritional status, food insecurity, emotional wellbeing, socialization, and self-care capacity are highly interconnected and play an important role in the lives of older adults. Many older adults served by SeniorsPlus live on a fixed income, are low income, rely on Medicare/Medicaid, or Social Security benefits. Our Meals on Wheels (MOW) clients are homebound, unable to prepare their own meals, and don't have available assistance to help with meals. Many of those served are socially isolated and rely on the social interaction that a meal delivery and wellness check provides to them on a regular basis; it helps to support a basic human need. This can make the difference between people staying at home or going to a nursing home or other facility. Helping to assist people to stay in their homes also helps to reduce tax payers' dollars while keeping these clients happy, healthy, and feeling less isolated.

When COVID-19 arrived in Maine, the staff at SeniorsPlus jumped into action to adapt its programs and services to continue to meet the demand in our communities. While we could no longer serve our clients face to face, we created telephonic and virtual platforms for the majority of services we deliver. The exception was our MOW program. Our MOW program continued to provide up to 7 home-delivered meals a week to the homebound.

Many additional older adults have been served through MOW as a result of the pandemic; people who were not previously identified. In comparing the number of clients and meals served from March 1, 2019 through February 28, 2020 to that same time frame over this past year (March 1, 2020 through February 28, 2021), the number of Mainer to whom we delivered MOW jumped from 1,084 clients to 2,078, an increase of 92%. The number of actual meals increased nearly 60%, from 134,558 to 214,569.

While we have received additional federal pandemic funding to help alleviate some of the costs over this past year, that funding is temporary; the need is definitely not temporary. As a result of the pandemic, we have recognized there are many more homebound older adults who need to receive reliable and nutritional meals. We do not want to remove these homebound people from the program when the federal pandemic funds cease. How do you tell someone that their meal service is cut off, or, that they have to be put on a waitlist?

I ask your assistance; I ask you to permanently increase funding so that we can continue to fill this vital need for our older Mainers; don't let our treasured fellow Mainers go hungry.

Thank you for your consideration of supporting this important bill.

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