



Testimony of Gerard Queally, President & CEO Spectrum Generations (the Central Maine Area Agency on Aging) a resident of Brunswick, ME

To Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Favor of LD 485 – An Act to Continue Funding for Home-delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and To Address Growing Demand

Delivered in Person on 3/17/21

Thank you, Senate Chair Claxton and House Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services for this opportunity today to bring attention the importance of Home-delivered Meals. My name is Gerard Queally, President & CEO of Spectrum Generations, one of Maine's Area Agencies on Aging. Spectrum Generations provides various levels of support to older adults, adults with disabilities and family caregivers across communities in Central Maine.

One of the services provided by Spectrum Generations is Home-delivered Meals, also called Meals on Wheels (MOW). MOW is a service available to older adults in every Maine location thanks to Maine's network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA).

Meals on Wheels is a program that meets the most basic needs of our most frail population. It is a home-delivered meal for older adults who are homebound or otherwise isolated and unable to prepare their own meals or lack support to have meals prepared for them. These are people who would otherwise be unable to get the nutrition they need to continue to live independently in their own homes and communities.

The core funding for Meals on Wheels is an appropriation for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program administered by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. However, this funding has never been enough to meet the need for the program. Funding is supplemented by state funds, grants, municipal contributions, fund raising, and volunteer support.

As you can imagine, demand for Meals on Wheels increased at the beginning of the pandemic as more older adults were driven into isolation and without the support systems they relied on.

Prior to the pandemic (FFY 2019) Spectrum Generations approximately served 1,229 MOW consumers each year, with an average waitlist over 300 individuals. During the pandemic (FFY 2020 and continuing) Spectrum Generations served 2,289 MOW consumers. An increase of over one thousand central Mainers.

This is a cumulative number that reflects all consumers served over the FFY. Some people need help long term, but many people come on and off the program as needed. These people are

often recovering from hospitalizations or otherwise managing exacerbations of chronic conditions.

At any given point in ‘normal’ times, as during FFY 2019, Spectrum Generations and our sub-contractors would serve 875 MOW consumers per day. During the pandemic this peaked to as many as 1,800 MOW consumers per day.

Recently, as case rates have decreased and while vaccination rates have increased, Spectrum Generations has seen a moderate decline to the point where **we are currently serving 1,494 consumers per day**. Of that number, 1,185 individuals qualify for MOW under the federal qualification guidelines; 309 individuals do not and would be removed from our rolls once the pandemic ends.

It is estimated that post-pandemic, federal funds for MOW will return to pre-pandemic levels. **If LD 485 is not enacted and critical state funding for this program expires, Spectrum Generations would have to reduce its MOW daily service delivery capacity to 810 persons per day. That would mean our waitlist would bloom to 375 qualified people overnight.**

How can I say this with such certainty? Mainers have always been proud. People who call us asking for MOW, are calling because they really need it. Still, social stigma related to MOW has always played some degree of people not receiving this assistance. They did not reach out to us; we did not know they were there. With social isolation used as a reason to make the call during the pandemic, this stigma has mostly dissipated. Nearly all Mainers are now open to receiving this vital service.

Stigma aside, the pandemic served to usher in the future of which we were already on course. This is the future of a growing older population. A topic that I am sure you are all familiar with. Decades ago, we talked about it as something that was coming, but now it is here. The 2018 Maine Population Outlook projected a 37% increase in adults 65 and older from 2016 to 2026¹. This means that just since the pandemic began one year ago, there are about 10,000 more people 65 or older. In turn, the growing demand for MOW is here to stay.

Another point I need to make is that Maine’s Area Agencies on Aging rose to the occasion. With disaster relief funding we doubled our operations, recruited more volunteers, and expanded capacity. Every barrier presented by the pandemic, such as doubling our daily output, was operationally addressed, and overcome. Every older Mainer who called, was served. The only thing that will limit us into the future is the amount of funding that we receive. **And this fiscal cliff is fast approaching and scheduled for October 1st of this year.**

We cannot fundraise ourselves out of this predicament. Spectrum Generations already raises over \$500,000 a year for MOW; far exceeding our federal match requirement.

¹ Department of Administrative and Financial Services. (December 2018). Maine Population Outlook 2016 to 2026. Maine State Economist. <https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/maine.gov.dafs.economist/files/inline-files/Maine%20Population%20Outlook%20to%202026.pdf>

Again, the consequence of reaching this date without additional funding is an immediate waitlist with hundreds of people. Consumers currently on the program will be discharged. New people calling for assistance will be put on a waitlist.

To put it in the starkest of perspective, in the near future, when someone is discharged from the hospital and in need of nutrition to recover and stay home, the program will not be available to them.

Because of this dynamic, there is a clear economic case for Meals on Wheels. Many studies have been done and show that MOW keeps people from hospital readmissions and even keeps people out of long-term care nursing facility beds. MOW has a clear return on investment. <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/learn-more/research/more-than-a-meal>

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 485 to support one of the best examples of a successful public-private partnership in which vulnerable older adults not only receive nutritious meals, but also receive opportunities for socialization, safety checks and connections to community resources that reduce healthcare costs and benefit our communities and taxpayers.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I am available to take any questions you may have.