



TESTIMONY

In Support of

LD 485: An Act To Continue Funding for Home-delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and To Address Growing Demand

**Patricia Thorsen
Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

March 17, 2021

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

My name is Patricia Thorsen. I am the Ombudsman Program Manager. The Ombudsman Program is a statewide non-profit organization that provides advocacy for older adults and adults with disabilities receiving long-term services and supports throughout the state. We serve residents in nursing homes, assisted housing programs, assisted living facilities, adult day programs and recipients of home care services. Additionally, we serve patients in hospitals who experience barriers in accessing long-term care services when they are ready for discharge.

We are pleased to provide testimony in support of this legislation that proposes ongoing funding for Meals on Wheels. This funding is important in order to address the growing need for this critical program that serves homebound individuals.

We know from our experience in providing advocacy to older adults and adults with disabilities who receive home care services how essential home delivered meals are in supporting these individuals in remaining independent in the community. For some individuals, this may be the only meal they have available each day. For those who do not have home care staff to prepare meals, home delivered meals are essential to their well-being.

Home delivered meals provide significant benefits to individuals who are primarily homebound. Kali Thomas, a Brown University public health researcher, found that home delivered meals provide health and psychological benefits to seniors beyond basic nutrition particularly for those who live alone. She found that home delivered meals could help seniors stay in their homes, saving the state money. Thomas also conducted a study for AARP. She found that for seniors living alone and receiving the meals, they had reduced feelings of isolation. Additionally, they also experienced fewer falls and hospitalizations.

Maine ranks number one out of all the New England states in terms of food insecurity. 15.5 % of Maine's older adults are food insecure. (United Health Foundation) For these reasons, as well as in consideration of the program's history of ongoing waitlists for Meals on Wheels and our state's expanding older population, the additional funds proposed in this legislation will be beneficial for addressing food access barriers for homebound seniors as well as planning for the future demand for this excellent program.

Thank you for your consideration.