

October 14, 2011



The Honorable Patty Murray  
Co-Chair  
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling  
Co-Chair  
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Chairman Hensarling:

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction now begins in earnest to consider the specific deficit reduction recommendations that were to be submitted by Members of Congress and Congressional Committees by October 14. As you do, the Meals On Wheels Association of America (MOWAA) respectfully requests that you give careful consideration to the impact your decisions could have on frail and isolated seniors who rely on Senior Nutrition Programs (SNPs) as their primary food source.

MOWAA is the oldest and largest national organization representing local, community-based SNPs – both congregate and home-delivered (commonly referred to as Meals On Wheels) – and the only national organization and network dedicated solely to ending senior hunger in America. We work each day to raise awareness about the severity of senior hunger and to support local community-based SNPs across the United States by providing professional training and financial assistance so they are able to serve more seniors who otherwise would have no access to nutritious meals.

While there are more than 5,000 unique SNPs nationwide, serving in excess of one million meals each day, we know more than six million other seniors are facing the threat of hunger in America. Without federal support provided through the Older Americans Act (OAA), there is no question the number would be far greater.

As you know, the OAA is the primary piece of legislation that authorizes and supports the delivery of social and nutrition services to Americans age 60 and older. OAA programs provide vital support for seniors who are hungry or at significant risk of hunger and losing their ability to remain independent in their own homes and communities.

We understand that taxpayers expect their tax dollars to be used wisely, and we are in agreement. In fact, SNPs are doing their part to work efficiently and stretch the limited federal dollars they receive. SNPs have a long history of strong public-private partnerships, and according to the Administration on Aging (AoA) every \$1 of federal support made available through OAA leverages at least \$3.35 from other sources.

So no senior goes hungry<sup>®</sup>

These SNPs also save substantial taxpayer dollars. Our evidence in this regard is based on 2006 data (in 2006 dollars) from a special project that MOWAA carried out in partnership with a major national insurance company. Through the special partnership, Medicare Advantage patients in select markets across the United States were offered without cost to themselves ten meals, delivered by local Meals On Wheels programs, immediately following hospital discharge. Participation was purely voluntary. Individuals who chose to receive the service were typically sicker than those who declined it. Despite this, the insurance data show that those seniors who received meals had first month post-discharge health care costs on average \$1061 lower than those who did not. The beneficial affects were also lasting. The third month after receiving those meals, the average per person savings were \$316. Individuals who did not receive meals had both more inpatient hospital days and more inpatient admissions per 1,000 than those who did receive meals. Given these facts, providing adequate funds for Senior Nutrition Programs can only be regarded as a strong and demonstrable value proposition. Beyond that, from a human and humane perspective, and from the perspective of the value of individuals and their liberty—principles on which this Nation was founded and for which it still stands—it is the only acceptable and right thing to do.

You know better than anyone that, if an agreement on \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction cannot be reached, automatic sequestration will be enacted. You may not be aware, however, of the impact that sequestration would have on the at-risk seniors served by SNPs. The Budget Control Act exempts low-income programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), from across the board cuts. Regrettably, SNPs funded through the Older Americans Act do not share such protection, because they are considered to be “discretionary” despite the fact that they serve our Nation’s most vulnerable older adults, most of whom are low-income. This disparity is deeply disturbing to MOWAA. More important, its consequences could be catastrophic for older adults in communities across this land who rely on these meals to maintain their health and independence. Therefore, we ask that you take particular steps to protect OAA SNP.

SNPs are making a real difference in the lives of our most vulnerable seniors each and everyday across America. We ask that you support this through action that will ensure that funding for SNPs, like other food programs cited in the Budget Control Act of 2011, are protected from sequestration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Enid A. Borden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "A".

Enid A. Borden  
President and CEO