

December 14, 2012

Dear Senator/Representative:

As you and your colleagues work to avert going over the fiscal cliff, 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 local community-based Senior Nutrition Programs (SNPs) as their primary food source. Specifically, we request that you give special attention to the Budget Control Act of 2011 and the direct impact sequestration would have on your senior constituents and SNPs in New York.

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 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 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.

It is estimated that there are more than 5,000 unique SNPs nationwide serving an excess of one million meals every day to seniors in need of proper nutrition to remain healthy, independent and in their homes for as long as possible. While this is something of which we are truly proud, we know that as of 2010, 8.3 million seniors or more than 1 in 7 faced the threat of hunger in America. This number represents a 78% increase in less than a decade and clearly marks our need to address this issue as a nation. For MOWAA, these are not just numbers – these figures represent 8.3 million individual faces, stories and lives of people who have contributed to society their entire lives and now need a little help.

As you know, if an agreement for deficit reduction is not reached in the next weeks, automatic sequestration will be triggered. You may not be aware of the tremendous impact that sequestration would have on vulnerable seniors served by Meals On Wheels programs. The Budget Control Act exempts some federal nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), child nutrition programs (School Lunch and Breakfast) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), among others from across-the-board cuts. Regrettably, SNPs funded through Title III C of the Older Americans Act (OAA) do not share such protection. These programs serve one of our nation's most vulnerable populations and save significant taxpayer dollars by helping seniors remain healthy and independent, thus reducing their risk for disability, illness and more costly medical care via Medicaid and Medicare.

The disparity between certain exempted programs and Title III C funding which serves an equally vulnerable segment of our society is of great concern to MOWAA. The consequences of

So no senior goes hungry[®]

sequestration would be detrimental to SNPs – and that, in turn, would be devastating, perhaps even life threatening, to frail older Americans who rely on them as their only source of nutritious food.

While the magnitude of the cuts imposed by sequestration are uncertain, an estimated 8.2 percent across-the-board cut would mean a loss of nearly \$67 million for SNPs. According to HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius at a March appropriations subcommittee hearing, that would translate to a loss of about 17 million meals for seniors who rely on them.

We know this 17 million meal loss would only compound that which has already been occurring over the past several years. In FY 2010, the latest data available, Title III C funds supported the provision of over 241 million meals nationwide. The Administration's Budget Justification of FY 2013, estimated that level funding would support 219 million meals provided by SNPs – already a 22 million meal reduction from FY 2010 even before a sequester.

When viewed in the larger context of the growth of the senior population, the skyrocketing number of seniors who face the threat of hunger, and the multiple challenges SNPs currently face to keep their doors open and maintain services – state and local budget cuts, smaller private donations in a slow economy, high food and transportation costs – sequestration is all the more frightening. Based on our conservative estimates, nearly 128,000 seniors could lose meals for an entire year.

Meals On Wheels programs are making a real difference in the lives of our most vulnerable seniors every day across America. We ask that you support actions to ensure that funding for SNPs, like other federal nutrition programs cited in the Budget Control Act, are protected from sequestration and/or further cuts of any larger budget agreement.

Now is not the time to cut funding for OAA Senior Nutrition Programs. Rather we should invest in them as a means to reduce overall health care expenditures and bring down our deficit. Should you have any questions or seek additional information on the estimated impacts in New York, please have a member of your staff contact Erika Kelly, Assistant Vice President for Policy and Legislation at 703.548.5558 or Erika@mowaa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry J. Tomayko". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Larry J. Tomayko
Interim Chief Executive Officer