**Meals on Wheels and Similar Programs Need Funds to Feed Hungry Seniors**

Minnesota seniors need our help. As Minnesotans continue to age, the number of frail older adults is rapidly growing. Most live independently in their homes and communities. Home-delivered and group meals are essential for people to remain in their homes rather than moving to more expensive institutional settings. Funding for meals is not keeping up with the need.

Increased government dollars made available in response to the Covid-19 pandemic provided meals for thousands of older adults. As that funding has lapsed, the need has come into sharp relief: the Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging projects that, at current funding levels, 487,000 fewer meals will be available to older adults in 2025 than in 2024, a loss of service for 1,900 seniors.

The Minnesota Legislature is currently working to pass a budget in a difficult financial environment. We need to be sure they don’t balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable neighbors.

The Senior Meals and Services Coalition (seniorservicesmn.org), a group of 50+ nonprofit organizations, has a bill in front of the legislature to provide $11 million per biennium for the Senior Nutrition Program. The dollar amounts in the original bill have already been reduced to $3.076 in the House version of the bill and even less in the Senate version. Funding at this level will close group dining sites and reduce the number of meals served through Meals on Wheels and other programs. We cannot let this stand.

Meals provided through the Senior Nutrition Program go to the neediest: people with low incomes, in poor health or living in rural areas with limited access to healthy food. People receiving meals often don’t drive, live alone or have physical conditions that prevent them from preparing nutritious meals.

One recipient, a caregiver for her 93-year-old husband, notes, “The Meals on Wheels program was essential after my right shoulder replacement. I was unable to cook meals and help with everyday needs. Without the meals delivered to our door twice a week, it would not have been possible!”

**[Add a story here from your own experience or area.]**

According to Defeat Malnutrition Today, a national nonpartisan coalition, one in two older adults is at risk for malnutrition. Poor nutrition is associated with obesity, increased stress and chronic diseases. It erodes the quality of life for older adults, increases healthcare costs, and makes it more likely that an individual will need higher-cost government support.

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, annual government payments for long-term services and supports for older adults are projected to grow 71% from 2023 to 2035. Long-term care costs in Minnesota are primarily paid for by Medical Assistance (Minnesota’s name for Medicaid). That means that we, the taxpayers, pay the costs. Home-delivered and group meals are one of the most cost-effective ways to support older adults, often preventing more expensive care.

The need is urgent. The health of vulnerable older adults in our communities depends upon this critical funding. Please contact your legislators today and ask them to ensure Meals on Wheels and similar services are available to those who need them.