

Tony Sarmiento, Chair
Robert Blancato, Executive Director
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro;

On behalf of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP), an 1,100-member nonpartisan, nonprofit, membership organization for national advocates for senior health and well-being, we thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of the authorized levels in the 2016 Older Americans Act Reauthorization for the **Older Americans Act Title III(C) senior nutrition program within the Administration for Community Living (ACL)** and for the **Senior Community Service Employment Program within the Department of Labor**. These authorization levels would fund **the Title III(C) nutrition program at \$864.7 million for FY 2018** and the **Senior Community Service Employment Program at \$454.5 million for FY 2018**.

Older Americans Act Title III(C) Senior Nutrition Programs

Older Americans Act congregate and home-delivered meals programs are provided in every state and congressional district in this nation. Approximately 2.4 million seniors in 2014 received these services.

So far in FY 2017, the Older Americans Act Title III(C) nutrition program is on track to receive overall appropriations of \$835 million, as part of multiple Continuing Resolutions from FY 2016. Unfortunately, this does not keep pace with the rising cost of food, inflation, and the growing numbers of older adults. In fact, year over year, the number of older adults receiving meals is shrinking even as the need is growing. Additional funding for congregate and home-

delivered meals in FY 2018 is critical to help to counteract inflation and provide millions of additional meals when combined with state and local funding.

Our major concern rests with a proposed \$54 billion cut to non-defense discretionary programs, we know that all programs in the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations budget could suffer. If applied across the board, it could be twice as high as the 5% sequestration cut from FY 2013.

The OAA nutrition program deserves your consideration for priority funding.

In FY 2013 when sequestration was in effect, our nutrition programs had lengthy wait lists and some sites even closed for lack of funding. One NANASP program created its first wait list in over 90 years of operation. Jobs and volunteers were lost and meal provision was cut back—many sites and programs had to stop serving meals some days per week. Sixty-two percent of home-delivered meals recipients reported to ACL that home-delivered meals represent at least half their food intake each day; these seniors went hungry on days where meals were not delivered.

Thankfully, your Subcommittee listened to the struggles of these older adults and restored pre-sequester funding for the senior nutrition program in FY 2014. We need you to remember their stories again to avoid another year of devastation for meals program and the older adults it serves. We cannot afford to return to this era.

Our request is based on the FY 2018 authorization levels of the 2016 OAA reauthorization—in fact, both of you voted in favor of these levels. These levels were carefully negotiated in a bipartisan manner between House and Senate Republicans and Democrats. They consider the rapid growth of the older adult population and the rising pace of inflation. They are sensible and fiscally responsible.

Investing in the OAA nutrition program is, in fact, fiscally responsible in general. Access to OAA meals is essential to keeping these older adults out of costly nursing facilities and hospitals. Further, on average, a senior can be fed for a year for about \$1,300. The cost of feeding a senior for a year is approximately the same as the cost of one day's stay in a hospital or less than the cost of 10 days in a nursing home. The cost savings to Medicare and Medicaid that this creates cannot be over-emphasized.

The OAA nutrition program provides jobs to thousands across the country. The program itself is also flexible, allowing local communities to tailor their local programs to meet the needs of the seniors they serve. This program is the epitome of a public-private partnership; local programs work in tandem with state and local governments as well as private philanthropy to provide their services. In short, the OAA nutrition program is the model of successful government, and it has worked for 45 years.

Senior Community Service Employment Program

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), also known as Community Service Employment for Older Americans, is authorized by the Older Americans Act but administered and funded by the Department of Labor. It is the only federal program that directly helps older workers.

SCSEP currently provides jobs for about 67,000 low-income older adults in every state and territory, and in nearly every county in every state. Many of these jobs are in the service of other older adults—SCSEP participants may work as senior center staff members, transportation providers, or home-delivered meals cooks and drivers.

SCSEP participants provided more than 34.8 million paid staff hours to over 20,000 local public and nonprofit agencies, such as American Job Centers, libraries, schools, and senior centers (including 7.6 million hours in aging services and programs) in PY2015. The value of the community service provided by SCSEP participants (using Independent Sector's estimated value of a volunteer hour) exceeded \$820 million, nearly twice the total SCSEP PY2015 appropriations of \$434.4 million.

So far, in FY 2017, SCSEP is on track to receive overall appropriations of \$434.4 million, as part of multiple Continuing Resolutions from FY 2016. However, this is not enough to meet the growing need for SCSEP—both in participants and in wages.

SCSEP also deserves your consideration for priority funding. Again, we base our request for SCSEP on the FY 2018 authorization levels of the 2016 OAA reauthorization, which you supported.

SCSEP is the only federal program targeted to serve specifically low-income older adults seeking employment and training assistance; moreover, the Government Accountability Office has previously identified SCSEP as one of only three federal workforce programs with no overlap or duplication.

The average age of a program participant is 62; according to the Department of Labor, 65% of all SCSEP participants in Program Year 2015 were women, 49% were minorities, and 88% were at or below the federal poverty level.

By providing subsidized employment opportunities for this highly vulnerable and underemployed/unemployed segment of the population, SCSEP helps participants build their resumes and receive the training they need to transition into unsubsidized employment. These subsidized employment opportunities also provide staff members for other community programs

that may lack funding for regular hires—not only senior centers, but also public libraries, schools, hospitals, and other community agencies.

Many states and localities are raising the minimum wage, and this dilutes SCSEP funding, which must increase to match these increases. This decreases the number of participants SCSEP can handle, yet the older population is growing. The last time there was an increase in funding for SCSEP, other than under the FY 2009-FY 2010 stimulus package, was when the federal minimum wage was increased, also in 2009. Though wages have not increased at the federal level since then, they have increased in enough states and localities to the point that SCSEP is becoming very strained.

As a job-creator and an unduplicated, successful program, SCSEP should receive top consideration for increased funding.

With more than 10,000 seniors turning 65 every day, now is the time to provide an even greater investment in these proven and cost-effective programs for older adults.

Thank you for your past and future support.