

**Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Providers  
(CANASP)**

**Testimony to the Aging Committee**

**In support of HB 5223 An Act Increasing Funding for Elderly Nutrition**

**February 25th, 2014**

Good morning Senator Ayala, Representative Serra, and members of the Aging Committee, my name is Lisa Labonte and I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Providers, the 9 regional providers of Elderly Nutrition Programs (ENPs) throughout the state of Connecticut.

As you know, as we age, the place we all would most prefer to be is at home. Fortunately, our state has strongly encouraged a sea change in recent years to rebalance the long term care system so that more individuals are cared for at home rather than in institutions. There have been many policy changes to achieve this and this is widely believed by both the long term care provider community, and of course consumers, to be a welcome change.

While the state has invested some financial resources towards this effort, they unfortunately have not invested in the home and community based providers who are essential to providing the care that allows individuals to remain at home and to age in place. Investment in home and community based provider rates is essential to the success of our state's rebalancing efforts and that is why we have joined with our colleagues in this field to encourage a focus on this need.

Elderly nutrition, often known as the Meals on Wheels program, is a key element in the home and community based network of care. Providing just one or in most cases, two, meals a day to an elderly person in their home helps ensure that they are not only eating, but eating food that meets the nutritional standards necessary to keep them healthy and active. Aside from the obvious nutritional benefits, elderly nutrition programs provide peripheral benefits such as having a person stop by the house each day. This daily contact is vital in recognizing signs that an elderly person is in need of more services. It also provides daily social contact for the elderly person, something that is essential to older adults living alone in the community. This simple and very inexpensive service can help prevent or delay the need for more costly services such as hospitalizations and nursing home care.

Unfortunately, reimbursement rates for services offered under the CT Home Care Program for the Elders, including Meals on Wheels, have not been increased since 2007. The ENPs rely on both federal and state funding, as well as private donations and suggested contributions, and that funding stream has been very uncertain over the last several years. While we recognize flat funding is better than a cut, it remains difficult because our private donations and client contributions have decreased and our costs to administer the program have gone up dramatically. The price of gas and food continues to rise, making it extremely difficult for meal providers to operate. One major provider has already discontinued providing meals and others are questioning their ability to continue.

CANASP is continuously working to find creative ways of bringing in money, such as looking at legislation to add a donation check off box on state income tax filing forms, and working with local grocery stores to participate in the a donation program we call "Buy a Wheel."

Unfortunately, none of these potential solutions is enough to offset our losses as our costs continue grow. It has been too long now under the same rate and we feel strongly that now is the time to increase the rates under the CT Home Care Program for the Elders, which is why we strongly support house bill 5223, and we urge you to do the same. The ENPs simply cannot continue to support this program without a rate increase, and in the end it will be our seniors who will suffer. We urge you to consider increasing reimbursement rates for elderly nutrition under the CT Home Care Program for Elders.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this matter.