Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Providers (CANASP)
Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
Regarding funding for Elderly Nutrition under the CT Home Care Program for the Elders
February 14th, 2014

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Tim Grills and I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Providers, the 9 providers of Elderly Nutrition Programs (ENPs) throughout the state of Connecticut. I am also the Director of Nutrition Services at Thames Valley Council for Community Action, in southeastern Connecticut and operate an elderly Nutrition program.

As individuals age, the place everyone would most prefer to be is at home. Fortunately, our state has strongly encouraged a 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. 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, unfortunately the home and community based providers who are essential to providing the care that will allow an individual to remain at home have not seen reimbursement levels increased or adjusted to accompany the growing need in the community.

Elderly nutrition, often known as the Meals on Wheels program, is a key player in this network of care. Providing just one or in most cases, two meals a day to an elderly person in their home helps ensure individuals are meeting nutritional standards necessary to keep them healthy and active. Aside from the obvious nutritional benefits, elderly nutrition programs provide additional benefits such as having a person stop by the house each day who is able to recognize the signs that the elderly person's health might be deteriorating, as well as something as simple as providing daily social contact. This simple and very inexpensive service while delivering a meal can prevent or delay more costly services such as hospitalizations and nursing home care.

Reimbursement rates for services offered under the CT Home Care Program for the Elders have not been increased since 2007. Seven years of no adjustments. 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, and that can provide for a stressful environment when operating under a flat funding stream. CANASP is continuously working to find creative ways of leveraging 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 Buy a Wheel program. Unfortunately, none of these potential solutions can be enough to offset our costs.

It has been too long now operating under the low reimbursement rate and we feel strongly that now is the time to increase the rates under the CT Home Care Program for the Elders.

For TVCCA, we are providing the same meal with all its costs (ingredients, staffing, transportation, etc.) but getting less reimbursement from the Home Care program than the meals paid for mainly through the federal dollars. This difference is @$3.34 less per meal in the CT. Home Care Program.

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 under the CT Home Care Program for Elders.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this matter.