

Aging Committee Public Hearing

February 5, 2015

Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Providers (CANASP)

Testimony Regarding

HB 6394 AN ACT INCREASING FUNDING FOR ELDERLY NUTRITION

Good morning Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, and members of the Aging Committee, my name is Jane Grant 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.

I would like to state my strong support for HB 6394 An Act Increasing Funding for Elderly Nutrition. I would also like to thank the legislature for providing Meals on Wheels with a 1% rate increase during last year's session. It is evident that you understand the importance of community based services including Meals on Wheels and the positive impact those services have on keeping seniors healthy and independent in their own homes. This was the first rate increase granted since 2007 and Meals on Wheels Programs continue to operate in an economy that has had a CPI increase of 13% since 2007. Statewide we face a shortfall of over \$800,000 each year. Programs are struggling to fill that gap through fundraising initiatives and municipal support.

Nutrition Services are a vital support for older Americans nationwide, many of whom are low-income, as meals provided through home delivery allow many older Americans to remain independent and living at home for as long as possible, delaying or preventing the need for more costly institutional services. Providing one or 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. Home delivered meals also provide a daily social contact for the elderly person, something that is essential to older adults living alone in the community.

Studies have found that 50 percent of all persons age 85 and over are in need of assistance with instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), including obtaining and preparing food.ⁱ

Meals on Wheels helps address their needs. Serving Elders at Risk, a national evaluation of nutrition program clients, found that nutrition services recipients are older, poorer, more likely to live alone, more likely to be minorities, in poorer health, in poorer nutritional status, more functionally impaired, and at higher nutritional risk than those in the general population.

Multiple chronic diseases and conditions negatively affect quality of life, contribute to declines in functioning and the ability to remain in the community, adversely impact individuals' health, and contribute to increased hospitalizations and health care costs.ⁱⁱ

Many of the most common chronic conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis are related to nutrition as a primary prevention, risk reduction, or treatment modality. Data also show that Medicare beneficiaries with multiple chronic conditions are the heaviest users of health care services.

Because the prevalence of multiple chronic conditions is higher among home-delivered meal program participants than for the general Medicare population, the provision of healthy meals, nutrition education and counseling are important to helping these individuals avoid more serious and expensive medical care.

Data from ACL's National Survey indicate that about 72 percent of home-delivered meal participants have 5 or more illnesses and conditions. About 51 percent of home-delivered meal participants take over six medications per day and some take as many as 30 medications. The home-delivered meal program participants are significantly less healthy than the general Medicare population and access to healthy meals is essential to their well-being.ⁱⁱⁱ

Thank you again for raising a bill that would provide much needed support for a crucial program in our state.

ⁱ Hung et al. Recent trends in chronic disease, impairment and disability among older adults in the United States. *BMC Geriatrics*. 2011. 11:47.

ⁱⁱ Lochner KA, Cox CS. Prevalence of Multiple Chronic Conditions among Medicare Beneficiaries, United States, 2010. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2013; 10:120137. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd10.12037>

ⁱⁱⁱ 2014 National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants. <http://www.agid.acl.gov/>.