



Megan Brown, Senior Director of Marketing & Development

testimony in support of

H.B. No. 5284 (RAISED) ACT INCREASING FUNDING FOR ELDERLY NUTRITION

Aging Committee- February 25, 2016

Senator Flexer, Representative Serra and members of the Aging Committee, my name is Megan Brown and I am the Senior Director of Marketing & Development at Thames Valley Council for Community Action. I am here today to testify in **strong support of House Bill 5284- An Act Increasing Funding for Elderly Nutrition.**

TVCCA has been providing meals to the elderly for 40+ years in New London County and for 28 years in Windham County. Last program year, we provided 3,460 homebound elderly citizens with nutritious meals and wellness checks.

The legislature has only increased the meal rate 1%, or 4 cents per meal, since 2007. Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders (CHCPE) reimburses service providers for home-delivered meals at the Medicaid rates of between \$4.84 (for a single hot meal) and \$8.85 (for one hot and one cold meal – also known as a “double meal delivery”).

TVCCA staff and volunteers drive roughly 1,300 miles each day to deliver meals. We are not reimbursed for mileage or other related delivery costs, though in some of the rural areas we serve, it can take up to 90 minutes to deliver to just 5 homes. Additionally, if the client is unable to receive their meal for any reason we are not reimbursed at all for that meal, though we have already spent the man-hours and perishable supplies to make it.

During the period of January 1 – June 30, 2015, TVCCA went unpaid for 1,304 meals, equating to \$11,547 in un-reimbursed costs.

Even with the 1% increase in 2014, our program and every other CT Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Providers (CANASP) program loses money on every meal it serves in the CT Home Care Program. We lose an average of \$1.44 per meal delivered – in 2015 this equated to a total difference of \$62,794 for all double meals served, plus \$13,448 for all single meals served. Operating a program in the red is not sustainable.

To continue serving our elderly, we need a rate increase that will provide full reimbursement for every meal.

TVCCA continuously works to find creative ways of bringing in money so as not to be dependent on the State. We work with our community partners for grant opportunities and fundraising events, but fundraising is not enough to offset our costs in the Home Care Program.

The home care providers who are essential to providing the care that will allow an individual to remain at home have not seen reimbursement levels from the Connecticut Home Care Program increased to accompany the increasing costs to deliver the services in the program, i.e. ever increasing food costs and labor costs, due in large part to the mandated increase in the Connecticut minimum wage to \$10.10 by 2017.

Elderly nutrition, often known as the Meals on Wheels program, is key to home care. Providing one or two meals a day to an elderly person in their home helps ensure that individuals are receiving nutritious meals while remaining in the community. But the Meals on Wheels program is more than a meal. This simple and very inexpensive service can prevent or delay more costly services such as hospitalizations and nursing home care.

Elderly nutrition programs provide peripheral benefits by having a person stop by the house each day who is able to recognize the signs of an elderly person whose health might be deteriorating, as well as something as simple as providing daily social contact. This daily "check-up" is a life line for many.

Without a rate increase, TVCCA may not be able to continue to provide this vital service and in the end, it will be our seniors who will suffer. If funding is not increased, TVCCA may be forced to limit service to less days per week, serve less people, or cease participation in the CT Homecare Program entirely.

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.