

# Aging Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-7072

**Title:** AN ACT INCREASING FUNDING FOR ELDERLY NUTRITION SERVICES.

**Vote Date:** 2/26/2019

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/19/2019

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

**Aging Committee**

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This proposal directs the Commissioner of Social Services to increase the fee schedule, effective July 1, 2019, for meals on wheels provided under the Connecticut home-care program for the elderly by 10% over the fee schedule for meals on wheels for the previous fiscal year.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

Dept. of Social Services: There are multiple services and hundreds of providers participating in not only the Connecticut Home Care program, but other waiver and community-based services programs. They believe that singling out one provider type at the exclusion of the others is inequitable and cannot be supported. If the Dep. increased the rates for all DSS waiver services by even 1% the potential cost would be about \$7.3 million, of which \$3.99 million would be the net state share. They also pointed out that a 2% rate increase for meals on wheels became effective as of January 1, 2019.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Ms. Peaches Quinn, M.P.H., President, Connecticut Coalition on Aging:** She offers support for this proposal because it demonstrates a commitment to supporting a person's decision to remain at home. With the CPI seeing an increase of more than 13% during the last 10 years, the funding streams have dwindled, yielding a recent shortfall of more than \$1 million for meals on wheels. Meals have been cut back, some programs have had to close leaving many without food delivery.

**Ms. Mag Morelli, President, LeadingAge Connecticut:** They support this bill which acknowledges the need to increase the fee schedule rate for meals on wheels. This is a valuable program which not only provides daily meals but also ensures a daily visit and eyes on contact with the elderly recipients receiving meals in their homes. They also suggest that the Dept. of Social Services revisits the statutory requirement that was passed in 2014 (PA 14-217) The report that was submitted to the General Assembly in 2015 was , they believe, woefully inadequate and did not meet the intent of the law. They would suggest that the Committee consider requesting the DSS provide the data and analysis required by that statute.

**Ms. Marie Allen, Executive Director, Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging (C4A):** She offered testimony in support of this legislation. Home delivered meal funds come from a mixture of Federal Older Americans Act funds, which support eligible adults who are not yet enrolled or eligible for the CT Home Care Program and Medicaid waiver fund which support Medicaid eligible adults through the CT home Care Program. The distinction between the two programs is important. Foods are prepared in the same kitchens, using the same raw products, packaged and delivered in the same trucks and often to the same neighborhoods but the reimbursement for the two programs have not remained equal. The Federal Older Americans Act reimbursement for meals has increased at a rate close to the CPI whereas the meals served in the CT Home Care Program have increased only 3% over the past twelve years. Another benefit of regular delivery of meals to the home may result in the only contact an elder has with the community in a given day.

**Mr. Steve Sutcliffe, Director of Food Services, CW Resources, Inc.:** They submitted testimony in support of this proposal. They point out that the Program has been underfunded for the last eight years or more with the cost of living increases totaling about 3%. A number of providers have dropped the SHC program and others are poised to follow because the program is not sustainable in its current state. Meal availability and quality have suffered, while an increase in mandates and reporting requirements have been placed under our collective umbrellas. While the meals are important the personal contact and physical wellness check of our seniors go hand in hand. In many cases the driver might be the only person that senior may see that day. They also believe that the cost to increase funding to make providers whole is minor when compared to the cost of premature admittance into a nursing home.

**Mr. Eugene Theroouz, Director of Nutrition Services, Thames Valley Council for Community Action Inc.:** he offered testimony in support of this bill and points out the difficulty they are having with level or decreasing funding while all other costs are increasing levels. In their testimony they make a number of cost comparisons and savings between the meals on wheels program and nursing home rates in Connecticut. They also point out that their drivers who deliver meals to seniors also provide socialization through their contact with them by observing and asking how they feel. This simple process can help seniors stay in their homes as long a possible without the need of premature entry into a supportive care facility.

**Mr. Joel Sekorski, Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Providers (CANASP):** He offered testimony in support to this proposal and included an attachment the show the ENP meals served, the cost of those meals, the reimbursement rates and the shortfalls between the two. He also states that chronic conditions like hypertension, heart

disease, diabetes and osteoporosis can be prevented or risk-reduced with proper nutrition. He believes access to healthy meals is essential to the wellbeing of our senior population and that it is beneficial to the state's fiscal position in the long-term.

**Mr. Stan Mingione, Executive Director, The Estuary Council of Seniors Inc.:** He wrote in support of this legislation. Their meal service is a benefit to seniors and it has a far reaching effect on a senior's ability to stay independent and in their homes. The benefit reduces nursing home stays, hospital re-admittances, and reliance on other forms of state aid which saves the state of Connecticut the costs associated with these institutional related forms of care. Because of census data they cannot show a "need" with individuals being at or below poverty levels. Despite individual wealth or means and through no fault of their own whether, it is an illness, death of a spouse or caregiver, loss of income, physical restrictions, they find themselves in need of services.

**Ms. Lisa LaBonte, Director, Meals on Wheels of Western Connecticut:** She writes in support of this bill. She says their program has a waiting list of 150 people. They have had to reduce from 7 days of service to 5 days of service and those who were receiving 5 day were reduced to 4 days or less. 70% of their trucks are over 10 years old and their drivers and administrative staffs have not received pay raises in over 5 years. The additional funds provided under this bill are desperately needed by them to eliminate the waiting list, restore needed services to their existing recipients, and to replacing some of their aging fleet.

**Mr. Eric Harkrader, LifeBridge Community Services:** He writes in support of this bill. While reimbursement has remained largely flat over the past 10 years the costs to our program have increased. Co-pays received for the meals go to CHCPE, rather than augmenting the reimbursement for meals. Every meal served to a CHCPE client results in a net loss to our program. By increasing the reimbursement for meals through CHCPE and having a continual increase codified, it would allow programs like ours to make important capital investments, improve and innovate, and ensure the continued service to CHCPE Clients.

**Ms. Gariann Chiarella, Director of Nutrition Services for Community Renewal Team:** She submitted testimony in support of this legislation. They are continuing to see tremendous demand for these nutrition services from seniors' throughout Central Connecticut. Last year, their Elderly Nutrition Program, through both their Congregate meals program and their Meals on Wheels program provided more than 550,000 meals to seniors. In January of this year, their Meals on Wheels program delivered more the 27,000 meals in Hartford County and they are typically receiving 45 to 60 new inquiries from those seeking to receive these home-meal delivery services each month. If this proposed funding increase does not occur, they may have to look at their ratio of CHCPE meals vs. Title III meals per truck, and start to reduce the number of CHCPE clients that they serve.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

No testimony submitted

**Reported by: Gaia McDermott, Clerk  
Richard Ferrari, Assistant Clerk**

**3/5/19**