



PA 24-99—sSB 396

Human Services Committee

Appropriations Committee

**AN ACT IMPLEMENTING TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
THE ELDERLY NUTRITION PROGRAM**

SUMMARY: This act makes various changes to the elderly nutrition program's (see BACKGROUND) funding and administration, including coordination with the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP). Specifically, the act requires:

1. the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) to give, within available appropriations, additional payments under the program to any area agency on aging (AAA; see BACKGROUND) contracting with ADS that has used at least half of its initial round of funding under a contract (§ 1);
2. ADS to require each AAA to develop a continuity of effort plan to minimize program benefits disruptions for its service area (§ 1);
3. ADS to develop a plan to streamline the program's contracting process, related compliance reporting, and eligibility and assessment forms (§ 2);
4. the Department of Social Services (DSS) to disclose to ADS, or an AAA contracted to provide program services, information on SNAP enrollees who request or are recommended to receive elderly nutrition program services (§ 3);
5. DSS to give ADS or an AAA, upon request, information on whether a person eligible for the elderly nutrition program is receiving SNAP benefits (§ 4); and
6. DSS, in consultation with ADS, to develop a plan to maximize SNAP benefits to support the elderly nutrition program (§ 4).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024, except that the provision on streamlining is effective upon passage.

§ 1 — ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS

The act requires ADS to give additional elderly nutrition program payments to any AAA contracting with ADS that provides documentation of having spent at least half of its initial funding under the contract. Under the act, ADS must, within available appropriations, disburse the payments within 30 days after receiving the documentation. When the AAA receives the additional payments, it must transfer them to its elderly nutrition program vendors within 30 days.

The act also requires the ADS commissioner to annually file a report, beginning by July 1, 2025, with the Aging and Human Services committees on the feasibility of the department providing additional funds under an elderly nutrition program contract when an AAA has used at least 25% of its initial funding.

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§ 1 — CONTINUITY OF EFFORT PLAN

Under the act, the ADS commissioner must require each AAA to develop a continuity of effort plan for its service area in consultation with the area's chief elected municipal officials and municipal agents for the elderly (i.e., those appointed by municipalities to spread information about services and benefit programs, among other things). These plans are due to the ADS commissioner by January 1, 2025.

The act requires the plan to minimize disruption to elderly nutrition program benefits when a provider leaves the program or if program service levels or demand significantly increase. It must also include an AAA applying for funding to support elderly nutrition program services through available grant sources.

The act also requires an AAA to notify, in writing, the chief elected officials, municipal agents for the elderly, and state and federal elected officials of its service area within 10 business days if program service levels or demand increase significantly. It authorizes the ADS commissioner to withhold funding from or take other remedial measures against an AAA that violates these requirements.

§ 2 — STREAMLINING

The act requires the ADS commissioner, in consultation with AAAs, to develop a plan to streamline the elderly nutrition program's contracting process, compliance reporting, and eligibility and assessment forms. The plan must include:

1. a template or portal that program providers can use to reduce redundancies in required reporting or applications,
2. automatic approval for program services based on a client eligibility assessment, and
3. changes to client eligibility forms to include no more than the minimum information required under specified federal law.

The commissioner must file a report on the plan with the Aging and Human Services committees by October 1, 2024.

§ 4 — MAXIMIZING SNAP BENEFITS

The act requires the DSS commissioner, in consultation with the ADS commissioner, to develop a plan to maximize SNAP benefits to support the elderly nutrition program. The plan must include (1) outreach to people eligible for both programs and (2) federally allowed uses of SNAP benefits to fund meals for people ages 60 or older and people with disabilities, and their households.

Additionally, the DSS commissioner must consult with the ADS commissioner and file a report on the plan with the Aging and Human Services committees by October 1, 2024.

BACKGROUND

Area Agencies on Aging

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The state's five AAAs are a central, comprehensive source of information about programs and services for older adults. AAAs are private, nonprofit planning and service agencies for older adults that receive state and federal funds, distributed by ADS, to carry out the federal Older Americans Act (i.e., Title III) requirements. Generally, they plan, coordinate, evaluate, and act as brokers for older adult services. Among other things, they award funds to local agencies, which in turn provide meals and related social services at local sites.

By law, the AAAs must (1) represent older adults in their geographic areas, (2) develop and administer an area elderly services plan, (3) coordinate local public and nonprofit private agencies and help them to develop programs, (4) receive and distribute federal and state funds for these purposes, and (5) perform additional federally required functions.

Elderly Nutrition Program

Under federal law, ADS oversees 11 elderly nutrition providers that offer nutritionally sound meals to people ages 60 or older and their spouses. Programs must provide one meal per day, five days per week. These meals are either offered at congregate sites, known as "senior community cafes," or delivered to the homes of people too frail to travel to the congregate locations or cook for themselves. People with disabilities living in housing facilities that are congregate meal sites may also receive meals. Meals are free, although contributions are encouraged. Both federal and state funds are used to pay the program costs.