



March 8, 2023

The Honorable Representative Mohamud Noor
Chair, Human Services Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
379 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Noor,

The DFL Senior Caucus is a grass roots organization of approximately 600 DFL seniors advocating for the needs of seniors through our 10 chapters statewide. We identify and support legislation to improve the lives of seniors throughout the state, endorse candidates supporting our concerns, and conduct Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts such as the 10,000 postcards sent for DFL candidates for the 2022 election.

We write to support passage of HF2523, authored by Representative Peter Fischer, which provides a \$20M biennial increase in state funding for the Senior Nutrition Program. Minnesota's Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and their more than 40 partners in the Senior Meals and Services Coalition have shared information with us about the impacts of severe underfunding for home-delivered meals and related nutrition services for older adults resulting in growing wait lists for access to food and delivery throughout the state. Our Political Affairs Committee has identified passage of HF2523 as one of three top priorities for this legislative session. Several factors are contributing to this current crisis in food access for seniors:

1. The core, ongoing discretionary federal Older Americans Act funding for food programs has been essentially flat accounting for inflation for years, and the state appropriation for the Senior Nutrition Program has not increased in decades.
2. Covid-19 recovery and stimulus funding enabled temporary outreach to older adults in need. The provision of meals by trusted local providers climbed to 3.44 million in 2021. In addition to serving almost 1 million meals more in 2021 (and 2022) compared to 2019 with COVID funds, the AAAs *also* served an additional 15,600 people in 2021 compared to 2019. But as Covid-19 funds for increases in meals were depleted the number of meals served began to diminish due to lack of funds. In addition, more seniors are having to turn to food shelves to provide for their total nutritional needs.
3. Meal providers have not been able to do significant outreach that would lead to expanded provision of meals because now the funds are not there to continue to meet the needs identified for meals and service delivery. As a result, in 2022, some seniors received fewer meals or were placed on wait lists. The same scenario will play out in 2023 and 2024. By 2025, when all ARPA funds are exhausted, and then there will no longer be a reliable, adequate home-delivered meals program for older Minnesotans.
4. The costs of food, supplies, personnel, and fuel have also increased exponentially impacting the number of meals available and ability to serve older adults in need.

The additional needs and demand uncovered during the pandemic is not going to go away. It will only grow as the older population increases through this decade. Meals for older adults who are food insecure and for those with multiple chronic conditions, dementia or are of advanced age are essential to support independent living at home, to reduce hospitalization and to prevent premature nursing home placement.

Please encourage your committee to support passage of HF 2523, to meet the needs for Minnesota seniors who live at home and for our state's system of long-term services and supports. Thank you for consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Kay C Hendrickson

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Chair, Minnesota DFL Senior Caucus

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cc: Representative Peter Fischer, MN House of Representatives

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