



Optage Meals / Presbyterian Homes & Services – HF 2523 Letter of Support

Dear Chair Noor and Committee Members,

On behalf of **Optage Meals** and **Presbyterian Homes & Services** I ask for your support of **HF2523 - Meals for Seniors** this legislative session. The health of older Minnesotans depends upon it.

The importance of this bill and the need for an increase in funding for senior nutrition was never more prevalent than during and now after the COVID-19 lockdowns. The temporary increase in funding allowed providers to serve more individuals. Despite what we learned during the pandemic; funding remains the same. I will never forget a phone call I got in March of 2019 from a hungry senior.

A nonverbal individual using an ASL interpretation service called. He asked a simple question: “Do you have any food?” I was excited to tell him about the funding we had in place for people in his position. He said he would try to find a ride and call me back the next day. He called first thing in the morning and picked up some meals that very same day. This went on for a few months.

When I brought the food out to him, he gave me the simple gesture of a thumbs up. I thought this was fitting. We were able give him some food, a simple gesture in every culture. Despite all the complexity COVID-19 brought, the thing that stuck out to me most was the simple exchange of much needed food and a much needed thumbs up.

In 2023, the reality is that some providers can't carry out these gestures anymore. Funding is inappropriately stagnant while the need for meals is at an all-time high. Federal COVID-19 related funds for food programs are gone. When temporary solutions are given for permanent realities you have waitlists, feeding people less meals than their body needs to be healthy, you have cutting people off meal programs because you don't have the funding to support them, and you have starving seniors.

Optage Meals implores you to support **HF2523** and add \$20 million (\$10 million per year) to the Minnesota Board on Aging biennial appropriation —amending Minnesota Statutes, section 256.9752 — to meet minimum nutritional needs for older adults.

Sincerely,

Avery Kearney

Provider Relations Representative