

Helping Our Most Elderly (HOME) Secure Meals Act

In the United States, the senior population is expected to double by the year 2060. With this growing number, the number of seniors facing hunger and isolation is also expected to rise. To combat this, congregate and home-delivered meal programs, such as Meals on Wheels, work to provide nutrition and socialization to older seniors across the country. However, to best serve our growing senior population we need to help these programs grow.

Based on a November 2020 survey, nearly nine out of ten local senior nutrition programs said there was unmet need for home-delivered meals in their community. To reach seniors in need, these programs rely on hot and cold vehicles to properly store food over long distances. Many of those vehicles across the country are in need of serious and costly repairs and others need to be replaced outright.

According to Meals on Wheels of America:

- 2.4 million seniors receive a meal each year;
- 59% of those individuals are living alone;
- 82% of all recipients are taking 3+ medications daily; and
- 8 out of 10 low income, food insecure seniors are not receiving the meals they need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the unmet need for seniors needing home delivery nutrition programs. In the November survey, Meals on Wheels found that:

- When asked if the individuals local programs began serving during the pandemic will still need services when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, 82% of local programs agreed, “New clients are here to stay.”
- In November, 96% of local senior nutrition programs predicted that food and production costs will remain high.
- In November, 73% of local programs said their safety supply costs/budget had increased; 66% said their meal production costs had increased; and 56% said their labor costs had increased (because of additional hours and/or decreased volunteers). **31% of programs said their costs had risen due to vehicle service and investments costs specifically**
- 62% of local programs said they would not be able to support their current client base without continued infusions of cash beyond their typical reimbursements and contracts.
- As of **July 2021**, the demand for services remains high, with Meals on Wheels programs reporting an ongoing increase in older adults and seniors served.

Background:

The Older Americans Act’s Title III Nutrition Program provides federal funding for Home-Delivered and Congregate Nutrition Services, like Meals on Wheels, to seniors who are frail, homebound, and/or isolated. In addition to providing a nutritious meal to seniors, these programs also provide regular socialization, safety and wellness checks and connections to other services in the community.

This bill would:

- Establish a 5-year competitive grant program for states to purchase, customize, or repair vehicles that provide meals to older Americans.
- Authorizes \$60 million a year through FY2022 to FY2026 for a total of \$300 million.
- Preference for grants will be given to states with:
 - High percentages of individuals who are 60 years of age or older;
 - High rate of individuals at or below poverty line; and
 - Have operating meal delivery programs at the time of application.