

FY25 Budget Public Hearing

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Testimony by Deanna Jones, Thompson Senior Center, Woodstock, Executive Director  
Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers (VASCAMP), Board President

My name is Deanna Jones, and I have worked as the Director for The Thompson Senior Center in Woodstock for the past 13 years. I serve as the President of the Vermont Association of Senior Centers and Meal Providers (VASCAMP) and on the Advisory Committee for Age Strong VT.

Supporting older Vermonters to successfully age in their homes and communities is important work that a wide variety of partners come together to accomplish. There are extensive studies across all systems of care that show prevention is the best investment.

Nutrition plays an essential role in promoting good health and preventing disease. Home-delivered meals on wheels provides the critical daily nutrition and check-ins that aid prevention and help keep people successfully at home.

As nutrition providers, we are seeing increases in demand for meals at the same time that food, packaging, and staffing costs are increasing. At my site alone, Meals on Wheels jumped from 5,800 meals in 2013 to over 12,500 meals in 2023 (115% increase in ten years). Based on the average cost per meal, the number of meals served, and current reimbursement rates, the gap that we must fundraise is growing. AAAs and small community meal sites can no longer fill that gap through local fundraising. In a recent survey of meals on wheels providers the average reimbursement rate was \$3.89 per meal.

I'd like to share, in part, two letters from the most important voices, those of our older Vermonters who receive meals:

*"I've never really been able to cook well for myself and when I was diagnosed with diabetes I was really scared. But, I talk with the chef at the senior center every month and we make notes on the menu. He knows what helps me. My doctor is happy, and I'm healthier than I've been in many years."*

*"Your gracious support over the past several years is deeply appreciated. It has allowed me to continue to live independently in my home and 'age in place.' I am now approaching my 99<sup>th</sup>*

*birthday and have decided it is time to move into an assisted living. I could not have made it this far without you.”*

In closing, I ask you to please support the total \$3 million requested for Meals on Wheels. We ask you to help us deliver this essential prevention program that reduces hospital visits, keeps people in their home and reduces the costs associated with caring for older Vermonters. We desperately need more funding to keep this program going so aging Vermonters can continue aging in their homes. Thank you.